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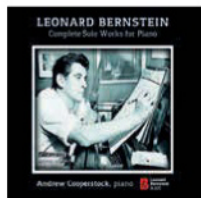
*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

### Bernstein

Complete Solo Works for Piano

Andrew Cooperstock *pf*

Bridge ® ② BRIDGE9485 (104' • DDD)



The race to celebrate the 2018 centenary of Leonard Bernstein's birth is on.

Performances and symposiums will abound, as will a cascade of recordings and videos saluting this unique individual's myriad artistic contributions. Among the first out of the starting gate is Andrew Cooperstock's winning two-CD set comprising Bernstein's complete solo works for piano. Given that Bernstein did so many things on a grand scale and with theatrical flair, it's refreshing to hear how much care and imagination he lavished on music of intimate personality for the instrument he played so splendidly.

And these pieces are often intimate beyond the keyboard. The set's first disc is devoted to the 29 'Anniversaries' Bernstein composed in tribute to friends and relations. These short creations, written over more than four decades, open a window into the composer's sentimental side. They are affectionate and playful, dignified and witty, as suggested by each dedicatee's personality. The subjects include beloved colleagues (Aaron Copland, Stephen Sondheim, Serge Koussevitzky, David Diamond) and others who played key roles in Bernstein's life. The second disc contains more extended works, among them the *Sonata for the Piano* (not 'Sonata for Piano') that Bernstein wrote in 1938 while a student at Harvard. The two movements look to then-recent masters such as Prokofiev, but the writing is tightly knit and full of lyrical and rhythmic hints of music to come. One of Bernstein's earliest piano forays is his arrangement of Copland's orchestral *El Salón México* for solo piano, an explosion of keyboard colours.

Bernstein returned to short forms for *Bridal Suite* (1960), written to mark the

### GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

## Sharon Park

The exciting young violinist talks about recording Ysaÿe's demanding solo sonatas



#### What made you record these pieces?

The first Ysaÿe sonata I learned was the Ballade when I was about 13 years old. It was really a turning point for me as a violinist and musician. I immediately fell in love with Ysaÿe's work and since then I've always been drawn to him. I love that he was such a sensitive but ballsy composer, and the fact that he dedicated each sonata to a prominent violinist makes them so much more meaningful to me.

#### What are the main inspirations?

The inspirations behind this music are very clear - Bach, Paganini, the violinists that Ysaÿe dedicated each sonata to - but the hidden inspiration that I think is so magical lies with the performer. Understanding why and how Ysaÿe incorporated influences by so many fantastic musicians invites the performer to explore their own individual voice.

#### What are the technical challenges?

Gosh, they really have everything! Left-hand dexterity, agility on the fingerboard, proficiency in the bow arm ... but I think most challenging is the musicality that underpins the notes and threads together the story of each sonata. It's not as difficult as it looks on paper to play the notes, but to really convey the musical journey is to me the most difficult and important aspect.

#### Did you enjoy recording in the studio?

I learned a lot through making this recording. Having been involved in every stage - recording, producing, editing - the whole process took me a step further in my journey of discovery as a musician. It allowed me to present myself in the most raw and unfiltered manner possible - authentic, intimate and 'live'.

marriage of the lyricist Adolph Green, one of his collaborators on *On the Town* and *Wonderful Town*, and the actress Phyllis Newman. The opening Prelude is a hoot, blending *Ave Maria* with 'Just in time' and Bach's Prelude in C major. The collection is scored for piano four hands, which Cooperstock, brilliant and sensitive throughout the set, manages deftly, thanks to the magic of recording.

Donald Rosenberg

### Brahms

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99

Brian Thornton *vc* Spencer Myer *pf*

Steinway & Sons ® STNS30081

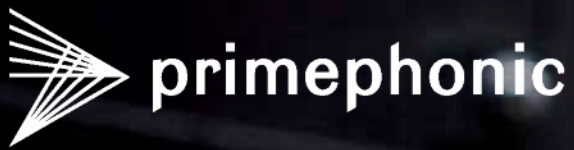
(55' • DDD)



These are consistently deliberate interpretations of Brahms's two cello

sonatas, not only in terms of tempo but in their overall character. The First Sonata begins in a ruminative mood that's sustained even where other performers allow the adrenaline to surge. Listen at 1'00", for example, and note how Thornton and Myer hold back, as if longingly clinging to a memory; then turn to Isserlis and Hough (Hyperion), who find breathless passion in the same passage.





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Cellist Brian Thornton and pianist Spencer Myer bring a pensive character to Brahms's Cello Sonatas

Thornton and Myer are heartfelt, certainly, yet there's sometimes a distinct lack of expressive detail in their playing. That long note that lies at the crest of the movement's main motif, for example, can impart so much ache, as Johannes Moser (Hänssler) so movingly demonstrates, yet here it's subdued into a more generalised melancholy.

At times, Thornton and Myer's deliberateness can feel ponderous, as in the First Sonata's *Allegretto quasi menuetto* with its lead-footed accents on the downbeats. In the third movement of the Second Sonata, on the other hand, their relatively measured tempo and meticulous rhythmic articulation hint at something dark and almost sinister – a marvellous effect and one that suggests a surprisingly close kinship with the Scherzo of the Piano Quintet.

Both Thornton and Myer are admirably conscientious of Brahms's dynamic markings – despite some overlooked *pianissimos* in the finale of the Second Sonata – and the performances are perhaps most convincing in moments of quiet introspection. Thornton's tone is occasionally strained in high-lying passages and there are a few moments of spotty intonation. The recording provides a concert-hall perspective, with plenty of air around the instruments. There is some

sacrifice in clarity as a result but one could argue that the slightly hazy sound fits the interpretations' pensive character.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Iserlis, Hough (1/06) (HYPER) CDA67529*

*Moser (HANS) CD93 206/7 (oas)*

## Harberg • Wolpert

**Harberg Elegy (arr Deubner). Viola Concerto**

**Wolpert Viola Concerto No 1, 'Giants'**

**Brett Deubner** *va* **South Arizona Symphony**

**Orchestra / Linus Lerner**

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559840 (50' • DDD)



Viola player Brett Deubner has had over 30 concertos written for him, several – as with the pair recorded here – by younger, up-and-coming composers, although the likes of Del Tredici, Danielpour, Lalo Schifrin and Samuel Adler have also composed for him. Deubner's strong tone, especially in the thinner upper register, is notably exploited in these two concertos, but the warmth and body of texture he draws from his instrument makes compelling listening of whatever he is playing, as, for example, in the opening measures of *Elegy* (2007) by Amanda Harberg (b1973),

originally composed for violin and piano but arranged by Deubner for his own use either with piano or, as here, with string-orchestral accompaniment.

Harberg's Viola Concerto (2011-12) is broadly conventional in design and tonal language. The opening *Allegro maestoso* was inspired by the idea of flight, not least of eagles, and I will leave to your imagination the implications of a *Lark Ascending*-like passage two-thirds through. The central Aria is, in Harberg's words, 'a meditation on the fragility of life' – its unbroken outpouring of gentle melody beautifully sustained – while the celebratory *Allegro spiritoso* makes for a rousing conclusion.

Harberg's music, resounding with inferences of many American colleagues of the past 100 years, is imaginatively structured and orchestrated; an attractive package overall.

Max Wolpert (b1993) classifies himself as a 'fiddler, composer and storyteller', and his bracing First Viola Concerto *Giants* (2015) is for me the real find here, three engaging and vivid depictions of 'Father Time', 'The Golden Harp' – of the self-playing variety often found in giants' castles in myth – and the roof-raising final 'Dance of the Cloud Women', their clouds evidently rooted over the Balkans. Viola concertos were never like this! Fine performances, good sound, terrific fun.

**Guy Rickards**



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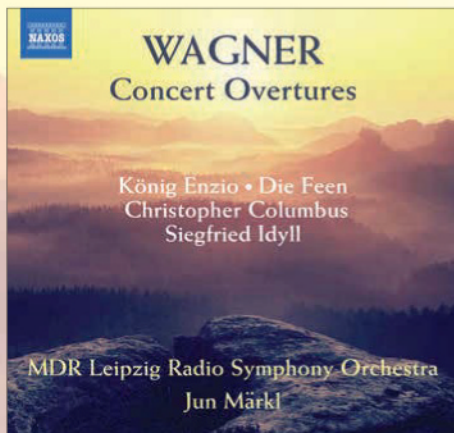
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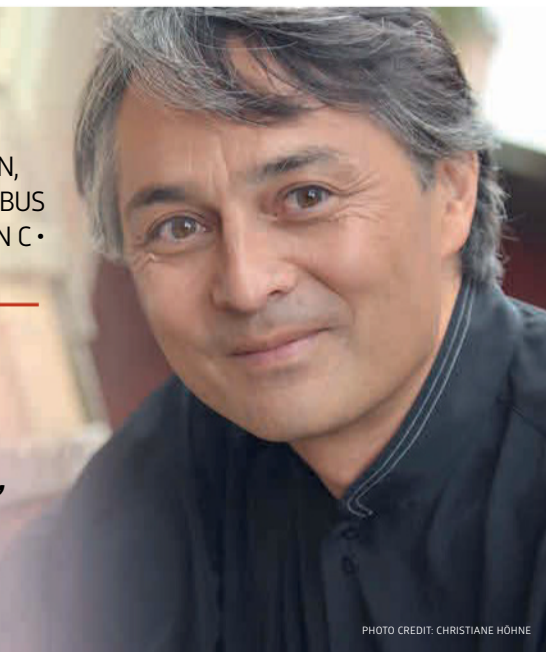


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## Hartke

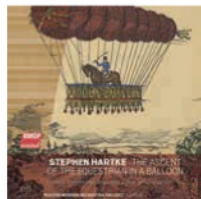
The Ascent of the Equestrian in a Balloon.

Alvorada: Three Madrigals. A Brandenburg

Autumn. Muse of the Missouri

**Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose**

BMOP/sound ④ 1052 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Stephen Hartke (b1952) is well known on both sides of the Atlantic, not least

due to his wide discography and the 2013 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition for *Meanwhile: Incidental Music to Imaginary Puppet Plays* (2007; 1/13<sup>US</sup>). Readers with longer memories may recall *The Ascent of the Equestrian in a Balloon* (1995), a finalist in 1998's Masterprize Competition, recorded for EMI by the LSO and a young Daniel Harding (2/99 – nla). I find it rather more involving than did Richard Whitehouse back then, a brash but not overcalculated tone poem (composed for his son's second birthday). Stylistically midway between middle-period Stravinsky and Tippett, it is an effective, entertaining concert opener. Boston Modern Orchestra Project's new performance sounds more focused and knowledgeable than the LSO's, BMOP's sound clearer with more depth.

Hartke is something of a magpie as a composer, not just fascinated by musics from all round the planet but unafraid and unashamed to reuse elements from them, as *Meanwhile* did with Indonesian gamelan. The three madrigals for string orchestra comprising *Alvorada* (1983) look to medieval polyphony (and a 13th-century Portuguese love poem) for inspiration. The result is no mere pastiche, however: the harmonic idiom is much closer to Bernstein and Harris than to Victoria or Obrecht, and the concluding 'Ballade' is vivacious and fiery. There are nods to Baroque forms in *A Brandenburg Autumn* (2006), which derives from a visit to Potsdam. *Muse of the Missouri* (2012) is different again, a substantial, flowing tone poem triggered by the great US river and (in its sparkling central episode) one of St Louis's fountains. The performances are splendidly realised, nicely balanced and make the best case imaginable for each piece. **Guy Rickards**

## Ysaÿe

'Portraits'

Six Solo Violin Sonatas, Op 27

**Sharon Park** *vn*

MSR Classics ④ MS1631 (67' • DDD)



What an act of largesse Eugène Ysaÿe bestowed upon music when he composed his

Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, Op 27. He wrote them to capture the individual styles of six prominent violinists, while making imaginative use of the instrument's expressive and technical possibilities. The sonatas, as the title of Sharon Park's new disc proclaims, are 'Portraits.'

Ysaÿe had to know his colleagues well to evoke their distinctive qualities. The First Sonata, in G minor, is dedicated to Joseph Szigeti, whose warmth and virtuosity are conveyed in four movements of divergent character, with Bach as the foundation. Jacques Thibaudet's practice 'Obsession' is depicted in the first movement of the Second Sonata, in A minor, which also turns to Bach even as it embraces the 'Dies irae' theme in many guises.

The single-movement Third Sonata, in D minor, is subtitled 'Ballade' to suggest the folkloric and poetic artistry of the Romanian violinist Georges Enescu. At times, the music fairly dances off the page. Fritz Kreisler is the subject of the three-movement Fourth Sonata, in E minor, with its nods to the Austrian violinist's noble and nuanced artistry. Two lesser-known violinists, the Belgian Mathieu Crickboom and Spaniard Manuel Quiroga, are the dedicatees of the two-movement Fifth and single-movement Sixth Sonatas.

Park plays each sonata with confidence, placing the varied demands in their specific stylistic ambiances and embracing both intimacy and showmanship. You don't have to be a violinist to appreciate the music or the performances. **Donald Rosenberg**

## 'Cartography'

**Franzson** The Cartography of Time

**George Lewis** *Spinner* **M Roberts/Ergün** *Aman*

**Wubbels** *Gretchen am Spinnrade*

**Mariel Roberts** *vc* **Eric Wubbels** *pf*

**Cenk Ergün** *elecs*

New Focus ④ FCR185 (61' • DDD)



Cellist Mariel Roberts plays four pieces written for her, beginning with

an assault on Schubert and ending with a tribute to vastness. In between, she turns her intense attention to more human experiences.

Eric Wubbels's self-referential deconstruction of Schubert's song, Goethe's poem and the mythology hits hard; patterns emerge and diverge, punctuated by piano drones and spiky, scary cello sounds, coalescing in a march of fearful industrial temperament – the sounds half human, half machine-made – that just stops.

George Lewis quotes Plato in his programme note and *Spinner* starts slowly, but after a while not only does the music begin speaking to you but the instrument itself does as well. It's not all cerebral; after a sexy succession of sensuous swoops and slides, the cello utters cries like a high-pitched whale using *flautando* harmonics, after which the drawn-out ending has an eerie eternal quality.

Written in collaboration with Roberts, Cenk Ergün's *Aman* opens with audiophile splatters of notes accentuated by the stereo spread, leading to a dialogue between disembodied versions of the cello accompanied by monstrous bass growls, urban noises and mysterious scutterings. The energy resumes before the piece can entirely slink away and the cello finally makes recognisable noises ending in cute mewings.

Nothing really ever happens in Davið Brynjar Franzson's *The Cartography of Time* but there is a definite sense that there is something valuable to be gained by staying with it on the assumption that there is some greater structure in place. There are long, prolonged wails that suggest there's actual music frozen somewhere in the glacial flow. **Laurence Vittes**

## 'Eternal Life'

'Sacred Songs and Arias'

**S Adams** The Holy City **JS Bach/Gounod** Ave

**Maria Dungan** Eternal Life **Fauré** En prière

**Franck** Panis angelicus **Gounod** O Divine

Redeemer **Malotte** The Lord's Prayer

**Mendelssohn** Elijah – Hear ye, Israel! **Mozart**

Solemn Vespers, K339 – Laudate Dominum

**Schubert** Ave Maria, D839 **Traditional** Give me

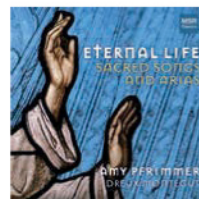
Jesus! (arr Hogan). He's got the whole world in

his hands (arr Hogan). His name so sweet

(arr Johnson). Ride on, King Jesus (arr Johnson)

**Amy Pfrimmer** *sop* **Dreux Montegut** *pf*

MSR Classics ④ MS1525 (48' • DDD • T/t)



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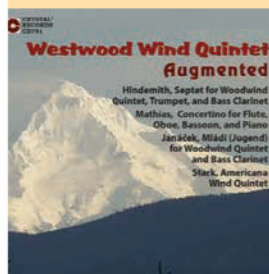
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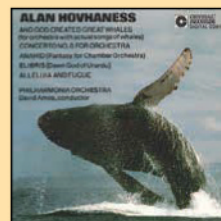
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Bold, colourful and intimate – Berta Rojas and Popi Spatocco give electric performances of Latin American music

her recording with pianist Dreux Montegut. Much of the fare is familiar, ranging from the Gounod and Schubert settings of *Ave Maria* and pieces by Fauré, Franck, Mendelssohn and Mozart to a selection of Spirituals.

Among the works known better in church than concert contexts are *Eternal Life*, Olive Dungan's song set to the Prayer for Peace by St Francis of Assisi, Albert Hay Malotte's rapturous version of the Lord's Prayer and Stephen Adams's majestic *The Holy City*. The music in *Eternal Life* ascends as the text moves to its hopeful culmination and Pfrimmer invests phrases with increasing intensity and vibrancy. Here, as elsewhere, she makes sure every word is clear, whatever the range or language, and her bright voice, while often too generous of vibrato, sends the messages urgently into space.

Pfrimmer is at her expressive, clarion best in dramatic episodes, such as 'Hear ye, Israel!' (from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*) and Gounod's *O Divine Redeemer*. In a series of Spirituals arranged by Moses Hogan and Hall Johnson, she savours the moments of celebratory zeal and religious ecstasy in close communion with pianist Montegut. These songs require a fine balance between urgent storytelling and rhapsodic declamation. Pfrimmer delivers them with passion, lucidity and respect. **Donald Rosenberg**

## 'Felicidade'

**Bellinati Jongo Gismonti Água e vino Jobim Desafinado Jobim/Moraes Felicidade Lins Começar de novo Moraes Berimbau Nazareth Odeon Ortiz Mis noches sin ti. Recuerdos de Ypacarai Pascoal Bebê Reis Se ela perguntar Trepát Homenaje a Baden Powell Villa-Lobos Chôro típico**

**Berta Rojas** *gtr* and guests; **Paraguay National Symphony Orchestra / Popi Spatocco**  
ON Music Recordings © (60' • DDD)



Self-described as a classical guitarist who 'mostly prefers to play Latin American tunes', multiple Latin Grammy nominee Berta Rojas puts her exquisite range of skills at the service of a musical travelogue through her personal take on the musical legacy of the Brazilian guitar and its key composers and performers. The 13 tracks are heavily suffused with tango, including the original 'savage and lascivious' Afro-Brazilian maxixe, bossa nova, big band jazz, cowboy, commercial and classical.

Listening to Rojas's simultaneously bold, colourful and intimate playing while reading Irineu Franco Perpetuo's booklet notes – about not just the giants such as Villa-Lobos and Ernesto Nazareth but also colourful

figures like the 'albino from Alagoas' Hermeto Pascoal and other virtuoso multi-instrumentalists – the effect is intoxicating. Appropriately for the title-track, Ton Jobim's *Felicidade* combines many of these elements in a kaleidoscopic celebration which Rojas concludes with a wide-ranging, three-minute cadenza against the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional del Paraguay on full display, including spectacular trombone riffs and sumptuously produced sound.

The CD is strewn casually with beauties for Rojas and smaller ensembles like the Paraguayan Demetrio Ortíz's film noir-ish *Mis noches sin ti*, with its seductive, earthy cello solos, the Brazilian Dilermando Reis's sinfully gorgeous *Se ela perguntar*, one of Nazareth's most celebrated tangos, his infectiously upbeat *Odeon*, and one of Villa-Lobos's most sublime creations, his *Chôro típico*. The straightforward, honest and electric performances give voice to the music with a feeling of being born on the spot. Recorded in Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, the sound throughout has fire and soul. **Laurence Vittes**



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## Long relationships and new chapters

**D**aniel Barenboim brought his Staatskapelle Berlin to July's opening weekend of the BBC Proms to perform Elgar's symphonies. For those who heard the recent Decca recordings and have added them to their collections, this was a chance to hear the combination of maestro, musicians and music live, whether in the Royal Albert Hall itself or through broadcast.

A speech Barenboim gave during the concert has already garnered much media comment, so instead I want to reflect on something else he discussed, at a small press conference to promote the orchestra's London visit and the imminent reopening of the Staatsoper's historic Berlin home. He talked about forthcoming performances, about how successful his Elgar advocacy had been in changing international audiences' perceptions of the composer (the answer: not as much as he'd like!) and also about how his relationship with the Staatskapelle Berlin has grown and changed over the past 25 years. A quarter of a century nudges it into the upper tier of lengthy conductor/orchestra relationships, a smallish group in which the tenure has become a very substantial segment of the lives of the conductor and, in some cases, even the ensemble itself.

When Barenboim took over the orchestra in 1992, Berlin was just emerging from decades of division in which the Staatsoper was on the Soviet side of the Wall. As Barenboim recalled, aspects – both musical and bureaucratic – needed to change, something which he appears to have done with characteristic diplomacy and understanding. A quarter of a century on, the result



*Martin*

is a wonderful musical partnership that continues to enrich everybody.

That relationship between a conductor and an orchestra provides the bedrock of so much of the music-making we cover. When we interview conductors – as we do Gerard Schwarz this month – such relationships with orchestras naturally assume the weight of chapters in a life. There are few better ways to take stock of those chapters than through recordings; and nothing offers a focus quite like symphony cycles. This month's Editor's Choices feature two such cycles. Yannick Nézet-Séguin's Mendelssohn with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe charts an ever-strengthening bond, but the COE is a unique ensemble without a chief conductor, so doesn't quite fit the mould mentioned above. Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony's Brahms symphonies, however, very much do: a long-established, esteemed ensemble and a young maestro forming an impressive partnership. Whether it will last as long as Barenboim and the Staatskapelle, only time will tell.

Speaking of conductor relationships, September sees Sir Simon Rattle officially take over the London Symphony Orchestra. Whether or not the weight of expectation is a good thing, the profile it will afford the orchestra and classical music in general surely is. The LSO certainly isn't shying away from it: 'This is Rattle' is the name of a 10-day series of events to celebrate his arrival. It's great to see that something as simple yet fundamental as a conductor opening a new chapter in his career is really grabbing the wider public's attention.

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### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Meet Barbara Hannigan and you find out what multi-tasking really means', says **NEIL FISHER**,

who interviews the soprano this issue. 'Fierce, frank and unapologetic about her ambition, she packs more into a two-hour conversation than most people do in a week.'



'Interviewing Elliott Carter's colleagues reinforced my gratitude for his presence on the New York

music scene and beyond', says **JED DISTLER**, who writes this month's feature on the composer. 'I got the sense that the man was like the music: warm, friendly, fastidious and continually evolving.'



'Les noces was among the first pieces by Stravinsky that I encountered', says **RICHARD WHITEHOUSE**,

author of this month's Collection. 'Several decades on, its qualities of conservation and renewal seem even more relevant today than they were when the work was written a century ago.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrell • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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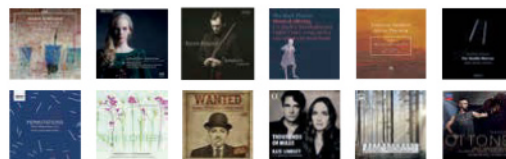
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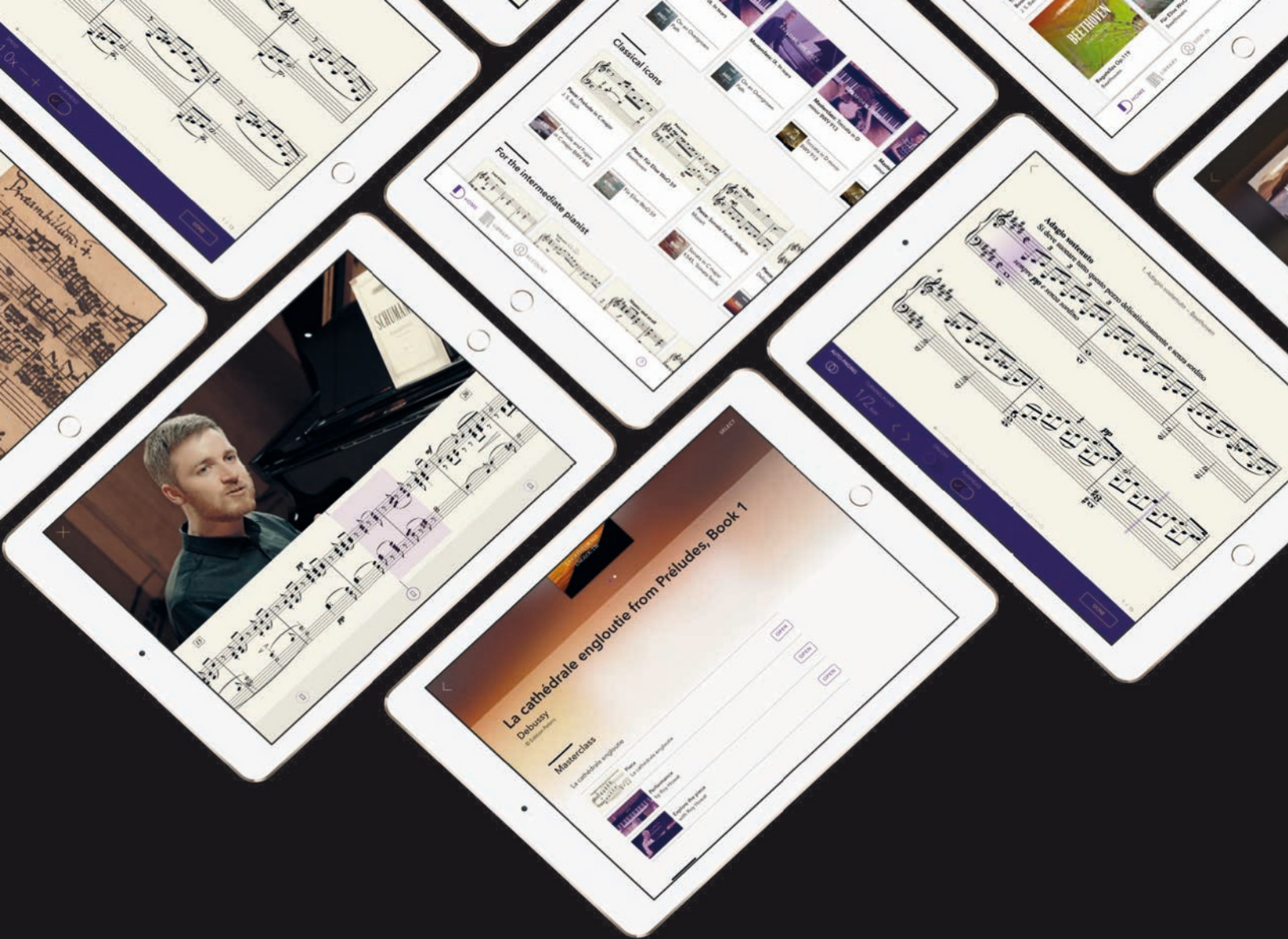
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# GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

**Martin Cullifford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



## MENDELSSOHN

Symphonies Nos 1-5

Sols; Chamber Orchestra of Europe / Yannick Nézet-Séguin DG

► **RICHARD WIGMORE'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 46**

Nézet-Séguin approaches the symphonies of Mendelssohn with an exploratory mind and deep care for colour, the COE responding with brilliance throughout this impressive set.



## BRAHMS

Symphonies Nos 1-4  
Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons  
BSO Classics

The second of this month's big cycles from big names: on this evidence, the partnership between Nelsons and the Boston SO is very strong indeed.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



## CARTER 'Late Works'

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Oliver Knussen

Online

Carter's late works – he continued to write beyond his 100th

birthday – are given vivid, reflective performances here by some of the composer's leading champions.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**



## MOZART Piano

Concertos Nos 25 & 26

Francesco Piemontesi *pf*

Scottish Chamber

Orchestra / Andrew Manze

Linn

If compelling evidence were needed that Mozart's K503 concerto is underrated – as Piemontesi asserts in this month's Musician and the Score – then here it is.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



## BARTÓK Complete String Quartets

The Heath Quartet

Harmonia Mundi

A year on from their *Gramophone*

Awards success with Tippett, the hugely impressive young ensemble are equally as convincing in Bartók's works for string quartet.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



## MOZART

Piano Sonatas, Vol 5

William Youn *pf*

Oehms

Other Mozart series and pianists may

attract more profile, but few attract quite the praise that Youn's beautiful and engaging approach to this music has. This is really worth hearing.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



## 'DREAMS & FANCIES'

Sean Shibe *gtr*

Delphian

Young guitarist – and like Piemontesi, a former BBC New

Generation Artist – Shibe's rich approach to tonal colour brings evocative depth to these (mainly) 20th-century works for his instrument.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



## RACHMANINOV

Vespers, 'All-Night Vigil'

Sols; MDR Radio Choir /

Risto Joost

Genuin

When the author

of our recent Collection feature on Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* places this newcomer among 'the very best available', admirers of this work need not hesitate.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



## R STRAUSS

'Through Life and Love'

Louise Alder *sop*

Joseph Middleton *pf*

Orchid

The debut recital

album from a very promising singer reveals a wonderful affinity for the songs of Strauss: Alder is very much, as we go on to say on page 11, one to watch.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



## HANDEL Ottone

Sols incl Cencic; Il Pomo

d'Oro / George Petrou

Decca

A strong cast and a

standout soloist in countertenor Cencic as Ottone – plus a well-paced realisation of the score by Petrou – makes for a dramatic listen and an enjoyable operatic experience.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 104**



## DVD/BLU-RAY

### 'THE OPENING CONCERT'

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Thomas Hengelbrock

C Major Entertainment

'A record of an extraordinary musical event ... highly recommended', as critic Charlotte

Gardner puts it. She was there, and is thus well qualified to assess how the event has transferred to film.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



## REISSUE/ARCHIVE

### GUNDULA JANOWITZ

'The Last Recital'

First Hand

The soprano's final recital, nine years

after she officially retired from the stage: a moving recording of a remarkable occasion.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 99**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

# FOR THE RECORD

## Pavarotti remembered in style

Decca marks the 10th anniversary of the legendary tenor's death with two major box-sets celebrating his immense contribution to opera



**D**ecca is paying tribute to the talents and important recorded legacy of Luciano Pavarotti this September. The record label is releasing some major box-sets and compilations during the autumn and beyond, marking a decade since the tenor's death on September 6, 2007.

Pavarotti's relationship with Decca – both when it came to operas and (particularly later) with regards to recital and aria albums – was an enduring one which has left the label as custodian of the great singer's remarkable catalogue.

Most eye-catching of the sets is a box containing the tenor's complete opera recordings, embracing every role he ever put on disc. The set includes his debut performance of *La bohème* from his hometown of Modena in 1961. While the label promises all the recordings will be presented in the 'best-possible quality', 21 of them have been remastered at 24-bit. Due for release on October 20, and featuring original album sleeves and a hardback book, the set – comprising 95 CDs and six Blu-ray Audio discs – will sell for about £160.

A further set, 'King of the High Cs', is due out next year and will contain Pavarotti's complete classical recitals for Decca across 22 CDs (again housed in original jackets) and six DVDs of concerts including the original Three Tenors concert in Rome plus the Hyde Park concert from 1990. Meanwhile, a new two-CD compilation, 'The People's Tenor', will draw on key arias and recordings. There will also be a 13-DVD set released towards the end of this year, of Pavarotti's performances at the New York Metropolitan Opera.

Few artists have caught the public's imagination, or attracted the attention of concert-goers beyond the average classical music audience, quite so powerfully as Pavarotti; 10 years on, such a comprehensive survey of his major contribution to recorded history, particularly opera, seems entirely fitting.

## Drumroll! Gramophone Award-winners revealed

**T**he *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards are nearly upon us! As we prepare for the 40th anniversary of these prestigious and influential recorded music accolades, we're pleased to reveal the 2017 category winners.

In this issue we announce the top three recordings in all 12 categories, from Early Music to Contemporary. Then, on September 1, we'll be revealing online which recording is the overall winner of each category and is therefore in contention for Recording of the Year, to be unveiled at the Awards ceremony itself.

Once again, we have been incredibly impressed by the quality of music-making captured both live and in the studio and made available to buy or to stream. Our world-expert judges have been enjoying listening and voting during these past few months, and we urge you to share in that enjoyment by exploring the shortlisted recordings. Please do log on to [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) on September 1, and again on September 13, to discover the winners. You'll also be able to watch the whole ceremony at [medici.tv](http://medici.tv) and of course on our own website.

## Nagano leaves Montreal

Kent Nagano has announced that he will lead the Montreal Symphony Orchestra for just three more seasons, until 2020. The orchestra had invited him to stay but Nagano said that, after 16 years, it felt like a natural point of transition. In 2015 the Montreal musicians signed a five-year deal with Decca; the first fruits of this partnership, *L'Aiglon* – an operetta by Ibert and Honegger – was awarded an Editor's Choice in April last year.

## Unheard Maria Callas

Following its huge box-set 'Maria Callas Remastered: The Complete Studio Recordings' (A/14), Warner Classics is releasing 'Maria Callas Live: Remastered Live Recordings 1949-64' – 20 complete operas, 12 of which were never recorded by her in the studio. The 42-CD set is released to coincide with the 40th anniversary of Callas's death in Paris in September 1977.

## Mine's a pint, says JLW

Julian Lloyd Webber is brewing a bespoke beer for Birmingham Conservatoire, of which he's Principal, alongside the Wye Valley Brewery's head brewer. The bottled beer will be sold in the bar of the Conservatoire's brand-new building.



Pianist **Llyr Williams** was at Wigmore Hall at the end of July, recording the final part of a three-year journey to explore the piano works of Beethoven. The box-set will be released in March 2018 on Signum ● At the end of August, BIS is sending **Carolyn Sampson** into the studio with regular pianist partner Joseph Middleton to record 'A Soprano's Schubertiade', a survey of Schubert's female protagonists. It's due for release in autumn next year ● Double bassist **Rick Stotijn** has been recording the music of Michel van der Aa for release on Channel Classics, due out some time in 2018. For the July sessions,

which took place in the Netherlands and focused on music for small ensembles, Stotijn was joined by his sister, mezzo Christianne Stotijn, and violinist Rosanne Philippens ● **Antoine Tamestit** was joined by Magali Mosnier and Xavier de Maistre at the Philharmonie de Paris to record Debussy's Sonata for flute, viola and harp. The result of the June sessions will form part of a Debussy anniversary disc due out on Harmonia Mundi late next year ● 2012 Leeds Piano Competition winner **Federico Colli** was at Potton Hall in July, taping the first volume of the complete Scarlatti sonatas for Chandos, due out later in 2018

## STUDIO FOCUS *Roderick Williams*

The baritone recently recorded English songs with pianist Susie Allan for Somm, due for a November release

### How did the recording come about?

Last August, Susie and I gave the final concert in the last ever annual 'Celebrating English Song' series at Tardebigge Church, near Bromsgrove – a farewell programme for the organiser. As we were leaving someone said 'You really should record it' – I had recorded most of the songs already, but this was about providing a memento of that occasion. So Susie contacted the labels, saying 'Roddy and I have recorded a lot of this before, but would you want it again?' Some people said 'No, that's absurd'. But Siva Oke at Somm Recordings said yes.

### Tell us about the sessions ...

A lovely man, David Long, offered us his house in Noke, just outside Oxford. He let us use his extraordinary piano and turned his barn into a studio. Siva was producing – she has a great pair of ears and I trust her, so if something's not working, she can just say so and no feathers are ruffled. The terrific Paul Arden-Taylor was engineering. And I've known Susie for years (I first worked with her in 1994), so it was all very reassuring, particularly as we were singing some of our favourite repertoire – it felt like settling into a comfortable old suit.

### The recording was crowdfunded, which meant that donors came to the sessions ...

It did put a small layer of pressure on me, as



Susie Allan and Roderick Williams in rehearsal: the duo have been performing together since 1994

I'm not so used to recording in that way, but everyone was very well behaved! I requested that they were out of my sightline and, in fact, as tends to be the case when I record, I closed my eyes most of the time anyway.

a painful process – I'll think, 'Oh my God, is that what it sounded like?' and I'm constantly surprised to find that, despite thinking I've been emoting away, when I hear it back it's actually dull and monotonous!

### How involved have you been with editing?

We didn't do much listening on the day – we just trusted Siva and went for it. I'm expecting a first edit to come fairly soon. It's often quite

### Any tips for a successful session?

You need energy, because any take could be *the* take. And you need to have self-belief, no matter how shocking you think you sound!



Pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard: one for the birds

## Aimard to record Messiaen for Pentatone

Pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard has signed to the Pentatone label after almost a decade spent recording for Deutsche Grammophon.

Equally at home in Bach and modern music, he begins his new partnership with Messiaen's complete *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, which he records in Berlin this August. It follows his performance at Aldeburgh

last year when, across 18 hours, he played the pieces at the times of day they depict.

The pianist was close to Messiaen and his wife Yvonne Loriod, for whom the work was written. Another composer with whom Aimard had a strong association was Elliott Carter, whose late works he recently recorded for a new set on Ondine, reviewed on page 50.

# ARTISTS & THEIR INSTRUMENTS

## *Guy Johnston* talks about his David Tecchler cello of 1714



“It was around 2010, when I was searching for a new instrument, that I heard about the Tecchler cello through word of mouth. My teacher had played on a Tecchler cello and I loved the sound of it, so I definitely thought it was worth having a look at. It was owned by another player, and he totally understood that I needed space to try it out in chamber, solo and concerto music, and so I had a good amount of time which gave me the confidence and trust that this was potentially the instrument for me.

As instrumentalists, what we're trying to do is find an instrument that we connect with, that somehow goes through to our soul. I've had so much experience in six years through this instrument – like any relationship, it develops over time. The instrument eventually becomes part of you.

I developed a concept of taking the cello, 300 years on, on a journey that celebrates its history, so I travelled with it from Cambridge to Rome, via London.

In Rome I actually stayed in apartments above the old studio where Tecchler would have been working. Not much had changed in that street, the Via dei Leutari – the street of luthiers – and it was a spiritual experience, taking the instrument home all those years later. Throughout that journey we captured recordings, and I commissioned three new pieces.

The piece by Mark Simpson really challenges the player – he creates this dialogue between the lower register and the upper registers, and in the virtuosity and the shape of it I think he does something quite extraordinary. Charlotte Bray's piece, which uses David Tecchler's name in the music, is also very original and testing, while David Matthews went more along the lines of a celebration, which is what it's all about!

It's such a privilege to play on this cello. I'm only a custodian, but I feel very lucky to have it and to be playing on it.”

*'Tecchler's Cello' is released on the King's College Cambridge label in September*

## Victor de Sabata revisited, 50 years on

The great Italian conductor and composer, who died 50 years ago this December, is being commemorated with a four-CD box-set from DG

Victor de Sabata, who enjoyed a long relationship with La Scala, Milan, was one of the greatest conductors of the last century. Best known as the conductor of the now-legendary set of Puccini's *Tosca* with Callas, Di Stefano and Gobbi for EMI, he suffered a heart attack shortly after the sessions and rarely conducted again (he returned to La Scala, Milan, to conduct the Funeral March from Beethoven's *Eroica* at Toscanini's funeral). His legacy for DG and Decca is

being gathered in a box-set, to include Brahms's Fourth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic (1939), an LPO *Eroica* (1946), Mozart's Requiem from Rome (1941), Richard Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* (BPO, 1939), some short pieces by Wagner and two works by one of his favourite composers, Sibelius (*En saga* and *Valse triste*, again with the LPO).

The set, due for release in November, includes reminiscences by Victor de Sabata's son Elio and daughter Eliana.

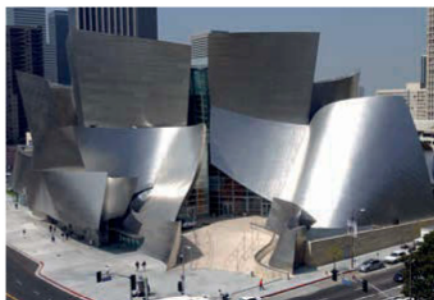


Victor de Sabata's legacy is being celebrated by DG



# Who will build London's new hall?

The architects invited to tender to build London's new Centre for Music have now been announced, along with plans for a new 'Culture Mile'



Gehry's Walt Disney Hall: an inspiration for London?

Some of the architects behind the world's most innovative recent buildings are among those on the shortlist to build London's proposed Centre for Music. Perhaps the two most eye-catching names are Gehry Partners and Foster and Partners. Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles quickly became one of the most iconic concert halls in the world when it was opened in 2003; Lord Foster's buildings –

including 30 St Mary Axe (the 'Gherkin'), City Hall and the Millennium Bridge – have meanwhile made a huge impact on London's skyline. As indeed has Renzo Piano Building Workshop, the architects behind The Shard, who are also on the shortlist. 'It is hugely encouraging that so many architects from around the world have responded enthusiastically to the challenge', said Catherine McGuinness, chairman of the policy and resources committee at the City of London Corporation.

The preferred site for the hall – which will be the new home for the London Symphony Orchestra under the artistic leadership of Sir Simon Rattle – is currently occupied by the Museum of London, due to be relocated. Both new buildings would form part of the 'Culture Mile', set to embrace the LSO, Barbican and Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

## ONE TO WATCH

### Louise Alder Soprano

There can be few stronger ways of demonstrating our belief in an artist than by making their debut recital disc an Editor's Choice. But that's what we've done with soprano Louise Alder, as you'll see on page 7. Her beautifully performed Richard Strauss song recital, released on Orchid Classics, prompted our critic Hugo Shirley to write that 'each song sounds utterly fresh ... Alder's soprano constantly conveying lively intelligence as well as strong characterisation'. This affirmation of her talent came as no surprise to *Gramophone*, since Editor Martin Cullingford was on the panel of the Orchid Music Charitable Trust Young British Soloists' Competition which Alder won in 2015. Other recent prizes include the Dame Joan Sutherland Audience Prize and overall Third place at this year's BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

London-born Alder studied first at the University of Edinburgh and then the Royal College of Music, graduating in 2013, and has been a member of the Oper Frankfurt ensemble since 2014. Next season she adds to her already impressive CV of roles with



Despina (*Così fan tutte*), Sophie (*Werther*) and Clorinda (*La Cenerentola*). But for a real insight into her ability to bring charm and imagination to both lighter and more powerful songs, we'd urge you to try her debut disc. You won't be disappointed!

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### Podcasts

This month's podcasts include an interview with the impressive young guitarist Sean Shibe, whose recording 'Dreams & Fancies', released by Delphian, celebrates 20th-century English works for his instrument. We also talk to Gonville & Caius director Geoffrey Webber about his fascinating disc 'Set Upon the Road', also for Delphian, which pairs ancient instruments with modern composers.



Sean Shibe: impressive young guitarist on Delphian

### Blogs

The pianist Christopher Glynn recently recorded a selection of Donald Swann's unknown serious songs for Hyperion (7/17). In a fascinating blog he explains how he came to discover these songs, and what they reveal about the composer more widely known for his career alongside Michael Flanders. He writes: 'They remind us that there is fertile ground between "serious" and "light" music, and leave a vivid picture of a man who knew only how to be himself.'

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BARBARA HANNIGAN





# Crazy girl

Canadian soprano Barbara Hannigan spends her time playing women on the edge but, as she releases a first CD as both singer and conductor, there's no place she'd rather be, finds **Neil Fisher**

Barbara Hannigan has died every night that she's performed on stage this year. This means that when we meet she has spent a solid six months kicking the bucket in some imaginatively varied ways. As Lulu, she has been stabbed by Jack the Ripper in the squalid ending to Alban Berg's elusive tragedy. As Agnès in George Benjamin's *Written on Skin*, she has jumped to her death to avoid life with a husband who has forced her into cannibalism. She has reprised the title-role in Toshio Hosokawa's *Matsukaze*, a dance-drama written for La Monnaie in Brussels, in which she plays a ghost of a woman who died for love, although strictly speaking this happened 500 years before the opera starts. 'So we've got suicide, we've got dying of a broken heart, we've got Lulu, who I think of as a suicide but also dying of a broken heart...' This kind of self-extinction, Hannigan thinks, connects to another of her doomed heroines, Debussy's *Mélisande*, a role that the Canadian soprano is currently tackling for the second time as part of the Ruhrtriennale. 'That's a kind of death by surrender – giving in, stopping the fight to live.'

We are talking in Hannigan's peaceful rented cottage in Lewes, East Sussex. It would be nice if she could spend her stint here thinking about her newest role in a cheerier light. It is not to be, for she is just a few days away from the premiere of Brett Dean's *Hamlet* at Glyndebourne, and as Ophelia in a strikingly messy production by Neil Armfield she stands no chance of making it to the denouement alive. 'I'm either on stage and disturbed, or I'm off and washing off the mud. After I die, I basically spend the rest of the opera getting cleaned up.'

This is an anxious time for anyone involved in *Hamlet* – the twelfth days between dress rehearsal and first night – but both Dean and Hannigan are showered with praise when the opera opens shortly after we meet. The 46-year-old soprano is especially singled out for a daringly staged mad scene in which, half-naked, she is spattered with earth, with reviewers hailing 'everyone's go-to mad soprano' as 'suitably deranged' and 'an unhinged misfit'.

This is the sort of appreciation that Hannigan likes: if she's not on the edge of what's possible, seeking out the extreme corners of her repertoire, challenging composers and audiences alike to travel out of their comfort zones, she doesn't feel she

is taking things seriously enough. Hannigan's artistic curiosity has already led her to more than 80 world premieres. She's clocked up more than 30 performances as Agnès in *Written on Skin* – that rare thing, a 21st-century opera that became an instant classic – and is continuing to tour *let me tell you*, the otherworldly monologue written for her by Hans Abrahamsen, her recording of which, with Andris Nelsons and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, won a 2016 *Gramophone* Award. As her career has evolved, however, Hannigan has also established herself as a conductor and a mentor for young singers. Her debut album as both conductor and singer, released this month on Alpha, brings together 20th-century masterpieces that, at least on paper, look irreconcilable. Its title, 'Crazy Girl Crazy', gets you somewhere to understanding what makes Hannigan tick.

Hannigan thinks 'crazy' is a compliment but that it can be misapplied. Sopranos play neurotic characters and, unhappily, they are also often labelled neurotic themselves.

In both instances, this behaviour can be explained. Since she has been preparing Ophelia, the plight of Shakespeare's heroine has made Hannigan question traditional labels. 'People talk about her "mad scene". On the other hand I don't think she's mad. She's had a trauma and her reaction is completely justified. She's a teenage girl.' Ophelia's episode is a kind of 'escapism', Hannigan argues, 'and the problem is no one stayed with her, nobody cared for her enough to keep her from committing suicide'.

As for the fragility of sopranos, Hannigan is frank about the toll her profession can take. 'The voice is a very telling instrument – it's a very delicate choice of career, because more than any instrument it shows not only beauty but weakness, and it changes every day, much more than humidity can change a cello. You can feel like you've been handed something to play and you have to go out in public and do it, and it's almost something that you don't know how to handle. That's why I work so hard on mental toughness.'

And yet, she admits it's precisely the fine line between losing it and keeping control that keeps the punters interested. 'The fragility is what makes singing for the public such an addictive art. I love that people come and they boo. Violin concertos don't get booed. And yet really good performances of opera get booed. That's crazy. It's wonderful.' Hannigan, you sense, would rather get booed than perform for audiences

*'Violin concertos don't get booed. And yet really good performances of opera get booed. That's crazy. It's wonderful'*



Conductor-singer Hannigan recording 'Crazy Girl Crazy' with the LUDWIG ensemble



who sit on their hands. 'I'm sure I offend tons of people. I think there are some things that I do in *Hamlet* that hardcore *bel canto* people will not like. I think it's kind of cool that I'm there, this interloper in the opera world.'

This is not the renegade role that Hannigan was supposed to have taken. She didn't come late to music, nor to singing. Growing up in Waverley, Nova Scotia, once a gold rush town, now a 'small village with a certain mentality', she had two inspiring music teachers, one at primary school and one at secondary. She endearingly credits the first teacher with fostering the same ethos that the late Pierre Boulez encouraged in his disciples, even though Boulez never had to keep a class of eight-year-olds on their toes. 'The discipline and focus we had was actually very similar – and there was similar joy.'

She branched out into dance and drama, taking summer courses in both. For her last year of school she moved to 'one of those *Fame* high schools', which prompts visions of Hannigan hoofing past the lockers in legwarmers. 'But I was always a musician,' she protests. 'I danced in dance shows when they needed a musician who could dance. Of course, now I use a lot of that in my work.'

Hannigan was treading a well-worn path – and when she realised where it led, she promptly took a swerve. At university she sang the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*, her first full operatic role. 'And I remember my coaches saying, "And now you must learn Zerbinetta [in *Ariadne auf Naxos*], you must learn Adele [in *Die Fledermaus*]." And I didn't want to play those people, those characters. I only saw them as fluffy, whipped cream. I didn't imagine when I was young that I would sing Lulu, that it would be such an important role for me, but I did know that I needed to find satisfaction in a particular repertoire, and going down the contemporary path was exercising an emotional and intellectual balance that was necessary for me. So I would sing all the high coloratura, but I would sing it in Ligeti, in world premieres. I would sing it in Gerald Barry and then eventually *Die Soldaten* [Zimmermann] and *Lulu*.'

Her unconventional plans put her in a category of one, and, for a while, she struggled to get gigs. 'No one wanted to manage this person who didn't want to be in the singer "box". I wanted to be doing my own thing.' This put her in the



curious position of booking herself to make her debut with the Berlin Philharmonic because at the time she still didn't even have an agent.

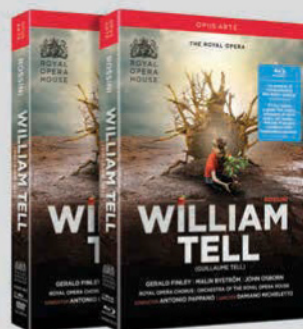
I suggest that Hannigan is unafraid to do things her way, even if it causes a rumpus. She denies the charge of rumpus-causing but says that new music needs ambassadors, and if conductors such as Simon Rattle and Esa-Pekka Salonen now trust her to approach them, she won't hold back from pointing them in a particular direction. 'There's so much music out there, and we're often listening to the same repertoire over and over again. I think it's an obligation for me to be quite ... well, maybe it is to get up people's noses.' It irks her that, when she's booked for a world premiere, it isn't always the new piece that gets the bulk of orchestral rehearsal. 'I'm almost always frustrated that the contemporary works come second.'

This, however, is something she can now redress herself: as a conductor. She first took the plunge in 2011 in Paris, conducting Stravinsky's *Renard* and both singing and conducting Ligeti's *Mysteries of the Macabre*, one of her party pieces. She took advice from Rattle, who pointed her towards the Finnish conductor and teacher Jorma Panula.



'Talismanic role': in Krzysztof Warlikowski's *Lulu* at La Monnaie, Brussels, in 2012

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let me tell you: with Andris Nelsons, with whom Hannigan won her 2016 Gramophone Award, and the Boston SO

David Zinman was also an important mentor early on. 'But you only learn by doing it, you can only understand what the problems are when you're standing in front of an orchestra.'

What she takes from scrupulously observing the conductors with whom she regularly works – Rattle, Salonen, Andris Nelsons, Vladimir Jurowski – is 'authenticity, that the physical gesture is true to that person. Maybe this is a word that's overused, but I basically think it has to be honest. No games, and allow yourself to be wrong.' She is uninterested in the idea of the great infallible maestro. 'Singers, we work with teachers and coaches until we retire, and because that's ingrained with me, that's how I'm always going to be as a conductor. You need outside eyes and ears. You need criticism, all the time. It's very scary when you get to a point that people don't criticise you and then they just talk about you behind your back.'



Hannigan as Agnès in *Written on Skin* at the Royal Opera House in 2013, with Bejun Mehta as the Boy

As the conducting develops, so the balance is changing in Hannigan's calendar. She has just won her first principal guest position, although she cannot yet say where it is because it isn't official. 'It's a three-year relationship where I will go for three to four weeks a year, and it's an orchestra I really love.' She has had enough of debuts with new ensembles. 'I don't want to have any more first dates,' she quips. 'I want to be third date.'

Her first album as a conductor-singer has come about in part because of the deep relationship – think, at the very least, three dates and a mini-break – she has developed with the Amsterdam-based Ludwig Orchestra. Bringing together three composers who have surely never shared a CD rack before, let alone one album – is it a Hannigan

manifesto? 'Yes, it is. The central piece was the *Lulu* Suite and then the second piece was the *Girl Crazy* suite by Gershwin, but I knew the Gershwin couldn't just be "a suite from *Girl Crazy*", although the two pieces were written almost at the same time.' Hannigan tells the story of when Gershwin was at a house party in Vienna and refused to play the piano because he was too much in awe of another party guest – Berg himself. 'Berg apparently said to him: "Mr Gershwin, music is music." And he played.'

Inspired by this unlikely love-in, Hannigan views the *Girl Crazy* suite as a 'mirror' to the Berg suite on the album. The Berg finishes with the final scene in the opera and Countess Geschwitz's haunting lament for the slain Lulu, the woman she loved hopelessly, and Hannigan interprets the first song in the suite from *Girl Crazy*, 'Not for me', as continuing Geschwitz's narrative: 'They're writing songs of love, but not for me...'

From there, the links get more tenuous, but Hannigan sees 'Embraceable You' as matching the relationship between Lulu and Alwa. 'And finally', she continues, 'there is "I Got Rhythm", which is this mad celebration of your inner centrifugal voice, which drives you to be alive.' To ram home the musical kinship between Berg and Gershwin, Hannigan worked with Bill Elliott, who won a Tony for his work on the Broadway (and now West End) production of *An American in Paris*. 'I would get his [Gershwin] arrangements, and I would add a tone row here, put *Lulu* in, references to Ligeti's *Atmosphères*, I was putting some Boulez in. So it's absolutely for me a companion piece to the *Lulu* Suite. The music is fun and rhythmic, but I feel it in a very serious way.' (The Gershwin estate, she assures me, is sanguine about this jiggery-pokery.)

The first item on the album, however, is Berio's *Sequenza III* for voice, written for Berio's muse, Cathy Berberian. The *Sequenza*'s strong associations with Berberian had put Hannigan off the



piece for a long time. 'It's almost done more like Berberian than done like Berio; in fact, I think everyone follows her lead rather than following his lead, what he says in the score.'

Sanctioned by the composer's markings, however, Hannigan has transposed the piece up to achieve what she describes as 'a very clean, very pure, sometimes angelic quality', and while chewing over the single line of text that Berio slices and dices – 'Give me a few words for a woman to sing, a truth allowing us to build a house without worrying before night comes' – she found another Lulu connection. She sees Berio's narrator as the lonely, poor girl who will eventually become Lulu the great survivor. The whole album, Hannigan concludes triumphantly, is 'a homage to Lulu: a homage to a person who knows themselves very deeply and the journey they took there'.

*'No one wanted to manage this person who didn't want to be in the singer "box". I wanted to be doing my own thing'*

Hannigan will continue to sing Lulu, her talismanic role, although the end is in sight. She will appear in a revival of Hamburg Opera's recent new production and in 2020 will perform the role in Cleveland in a semi-staging under the baton of Franz Welser-Möst. 'And I have plans to conduct it, the whole opera, but that wouldn't be until a couple of years after that.' There are also plenty of world premieres to come. The new season at Covent Garden brings George Benjamin's *Lessons in Love and Violence*, in which Hannigan plays King Edward II's wronged, plotting wife Isabella. In the autumn of 2018 there is Michael Jarrell's *Bérénice* at the Paris Opéra, and after that, in Munich, a full opera from Hans Abrahamsen, *The Snow Queen*, with Hannigan as Gerda. 'Frozen – the opera' it won't be since, at Hannigan's suggestion, Abrahamsen has written the sinister title-role as a part for a bass-baritone – 'which is scary, if it's not done camp'.

To this intense schedule can be added the first production by Equilibrium, Hannigan's young artists programme: a series of semi-staged performances of *The Rake's Progress*, starting in Gothenburg, which Hannigan will conduct. She has had applications from 35 countries to join the scheme, and while she couldn't audition them all, 'I have a pre-screening process, so I watch videos, or they write a personal letter and I read their CV. I'm looking at all the factors of what makes up an interesting artist.' She is hoping to have enough singers to field three different casts for the touring *Rake*, and will be assembling the 'Barbara Squad' in November. 'We'll work for 10 days. My friend Jackie Reardon, a sports coach, will come in and work with everyone. She's worked with the Dutch Olympic hockey and archery teams, and with all kinds of athletes. She works on mental focus, meditation, how to get the machine working at peak level.'

It sounds exhausting just talking about it, but Hannigan has set the bar high for anyone wishing to reach Equilibrium. No, they don't have to all be note-perfect in Boulez, Barry or Berio – but it might help. One young man snuck in before the midnight deadline with a taped performance of Webern. 'So I thought he must know a little about me,' she laughs. Seriously, though, Hannigan insists that not every singer has to be a specialist in contemporary music. She is looking for the right attitude. 'Whether they're going to sing *Traviata* or Brett Dean it's got to be ...' She pauses, hunting for a good word. 'It's got to have an edge.' **G**

'Crazy Girl Crazy' on *Alpha Classics* will be reviewed next issue

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# Elliott Carter's grand finale

In his last three decades, the US composer's productivity only increased as the once-painstaking process of composing was replaced by a new-found fluency and freedom, writes **Jed Distler**

**T**he music begins with a cymbal crash, followed by brass outbursts morphing into aphoristic gestures that flicker around and below a bed of high sustained string chords. A xylophone and a flute sneak in, trying to stir things up, but, no, the sustained strings build more intensely, while a melody with widely spaced intervals emerges in the woodwinds. All of this activity unfolds within the first minute of a brief three-movement orchestral piece. The music's vividness and clarity grip your attention. It's like when a narrative establishes character, location, mood and plot premise on page one, only to confound your expectations later on. The musical language is essentially atonal yet not abstract or obscure; the music says precisely what it needs to say. If melodic lines don't necessarily linger in the immediate memory, the overall energy, the inventive orchestration and the short silences for dramatic effect certainly do.

After the piece concludes, its 96-year-old composer acknowledges the heartfelt ovation greeting the full premiere of his *Three Illusions for Orchestra*, with James Levine conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra on October 6, 2005. For the next eight years, up until months before his death just short of his 104th birthday, Elliott Carter would go on to compose many more pieces. For a composer to produce such a sheer volume and quality of music at so advanced an age has few notable precedents. This fact is all the more remarkable when one considers that from the 1950s through to the late 1970s the younger Carter was anything *but* prolific, producing his complex scores with painstaking deliberation after many preliminary sketches.

Born in New York City on December 11, 1908, Carter was immersed in new music and new sounds from the beginning. He remembered being attuned to the sounds of the city, experiencing the booming resonance in the 168th subway station's large tunnel after he and fellow teenage chums lit

firecrackers. He attended notable New York premieres, such as a concert production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* at Carnegie Hall, where he sat next to George Gershwin. Carter credited the American pianist Katherine Ruth Heyman with exposing him at a young age to relatively new keyboard works such as Scriabin's sonatas, pieces by Schoenberg, and even parts of Ives's all-but-unknown *Concord Sonata*. Ives was a family friend, who not only wrote a recommendation for Carter to be accepted into Harvard University but also encouraged him to become a composer.

Contemporary cinema and literature also influenced Carter's ideas about form and texture, which would come home to roost by the 1940s. He was impressed by Sergei Eisenstein's innovative use of montage, rapid cross-cutting and varying camera angles in *Battleship Potemkin* and admired the combination of skittish freedom and meticulous structural control characterising James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Dissatisfied with his early compositional efforts, Carter travelled to Paris in the early

1930s to study with Nadia Boulanger. 'She didn't like the kind of dissonant music that I wanted to write, but she was extremely helpful,' he recalled in a 2002 interview with Alan Baker.

Along with compositional feedback, Boulanger provided a rigorous tutelage in traditional counterpoint that would prove crucial. 'That sticks in your head and it has an effect on the way I think about music still,' Carter told Baker, 'although I don't write anything like that now. The idea of counterpoint, for instance, is something that has invaded my music, and very few people today can write counterpoint. Maybe they don't want to write it, I don't know, but when they do it's a mess. Mine is not so bad.'

Carter's works from the 1930s up until the mid-1940s reflect many aspects of the prevalent American populist style, which counted Aaron Copland and Roy Harris among its major exponents. These include orchestral pieces such as the *Pocahontas Suite* (1939), the *Symphony No 1* (1942) and the *Holiday Overture* (1944). Having sung with the Harvard Glee

*'Very few people today can write counterpoint. Maybe they don't want to write it, I don't know, but when they do it's a mess. Mine is not so bad'*



Few notable precedents: the composer Elliott Carter produced new works, astonishing in quality as well as sheer quantity, several years past his 100th birthday

Club where he gained first-hand experience with choral works such as Bach's Mass in B minor and Brahms's *German Requiem* and even madrigals and plainchant, it was only natural for Carter to try his hand at writing for voice. Later in life, he described his numerous choral and solo vocal works from that time as being 'fine for what they are'. They are better than that. Indeed, the dazzling linear interplay and rich harmonic movement in the final section of *The Harmony of Morning* (1944) for women's chorus make a tremendous impact in live performance to this day.

The postwar years marked a period of transition, notably in the Piano Sonata (1945-56), a work that Carter described as presenting the gradual elimination of a definite scheme of tonality, wavering between two keys a semitone apart. In a 2013 interview, Pierre-Laurent Aimard explained that because Carter's music is polyphonic and the piano is a polyphonic instrument, it is logical that this instrument suits his style so well. 'Also, pianists always try to imitate other instruments, try to sing, try to be like percussion ... this is what we do in music that is so strong in character and so varied in expression.'

In addition, the Sonata's rhythmic pliability reflects Carter's fascination with the freedom characterising such great jazz piano virtuosos as Art Tatum, whom he revered. The Cello Sonata (1948) evolves further in the sense that Carter assigns a specific character to each instrument: the cello's broad lyricism and rhapsodic trajectory versus an abstractly reticent piano. One hears Carter finding his voice, yet the 1951 String Quartet is where he truly discovers his identity.

'I had been waiting for just such an opportunity to give form to a number of novel ideas I had had over the previous years,' Carter said in a 1960 interview, 'and to work out in an extended composition the character, expression and logic these ideas seemed to demand. I felt that I was constantly pushing into an unexplored musical realm.' In a certain sense, his First Quartet's stylistic breakthrough reflects the composer's desire to go back to the modernism that interested him in his youth. The work embodies a technique closely (though not exclusively) associated with Carter's music in general: metric modulation. It is worth quoting the composer demystifying this concept. 'The idea was to have various layers of rhythms going on at the same time, at



# Armenia: back in focus as a musical powerhouse

## Championing artists, growing audiences and making a statement

The colonnaded facade of the Yerevan Opera Theatre and Khachaturian Concert Hall dominates the skyline of the Armenian capital. In front of the Concert Hall sits a statue of Armenia's most famous musical son, Aram Khachaturian. But Yerevan and the whole of Armenia was a hub for musicians from throughout the Eurasian region long before Khachaturian's time and remains so to this day. The difference now is that musicians come from far further afield too.

Yerevan's position as a centre for excellence in classical music was reinforced in July 2017 with the launch of the Armenia International Music Festival and Competition – a major enterprise that saw the best of Armenian and international musicians joining together for nine days of exceptional and unique music-making. It also launched a special collaboration with the Malta International Music Festival 2018, hosted in the year's European Capital of Culture, Valletta ([maltafest.eu](http://maltafest.eu)).

For the competitive element of the inaugural festival, 48 young pianists from 14 countries were chosen to participate. In the first round, each presented a solo recital with a free choice of repertoire. But there was one prescribed work: the delightful but demanding suite *Childhood Memories* by the Festival's composer-in-residence, the American-Maltese composer Alexey Shor. Accolades have poured on to Shor's music from many quarters, with the Georgian composer Giya Kancheli experiencing 'a feeling of overwhelming peace and harmony' on hearing *Childhood Memories*. 'His music is very pleasing to the ear', continued Kancheli. 'His admiration for the epoch of post-Bachian classicism is clear.'

Pianists from Armenia, China, France, Georgia, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Poland and Russia were chosen to proceed to the next round. But it was a native Armenian, Hripsime Aghaqaryan, who took the First Prize of €10,000 and the prospects of a fine international career; the other prize-winners were Khachik Andreasyan,



Alexey Shor, the festival's composer-in-residence

also from Armenia, Dominik Wizjan of Poland and Seolhwa Kim of South Korea. All four pianists – plus Georgian entrant Tamta Magradze – receive vouchers of participation in the Malta International

### *The 2018 Festival is set to be even more revelatory*

Piano Competition 2018, which offers a total prize fund of €200,000.

Such international cooperation tells of the unique status of the Armenia International Festival. Konstantin Ishkhanov, President of the European Foundation for the Support of Culture which organises the event in collaboration with the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia, stated that the Festival and Competition will not only 'discover, promote and support the great masters of the keyboard emerging in this generation' but also pose a unique opportunity for the discovery of unusual repertoire, 'providing audiences with a unique experience and building the audiences of the future'.

That is evident from the Festival element's rich daily concert schedule.

Performances can be experienced by those in Yerevan and by a potential audience of millions online. Highlights of 2017's concerts included Maxim Vengerov's performance of Alexey Shor's *Lonely Sail*, which the violinist described as 'amazing music, very melodic!', and the great Armenian cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan's interpretation of his heartfelt *Three Pieces* for cello and orchestra. Both pieces were performed by the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia under its conductor Sergey Smbatyan. 'The audience is great – very warm', recalled Vengerov. 'A festival-competition format is special for young performers and it has been a great pleasure to be part of it. Last time I met Sergey he told me about his ideas and plans. There was an amazing spark in his eyes – and the result we see in this unique festival and competition.'

Vengerov was smitten by the country and its people. 'It is a true feast to be in Armenia', he beams. 'I was very happy to perform with my friend maestro Smbatyan and his amazing ensemble. I've heard people talking about the Armenian Festival in France and Germany – it's already famous throughout the whole world.'

A further important element of the festival is the message it sends to the world about Armenia and music, a point echoed by pianist Nareh Arghamanyan, who premiered Shor's *Travel Notebook* at this year's festival. 'Armenia International Music Festival is unique and has a strong statement to make', she said, 'that Armenia may be a small country, but it nevertheless has a powerful place in the classical music world through its talented musicians and artists of great calibre.'

Following the unique experiences, new discoveries and huge audience appreciation experienced at the inaugural Armenia International Music Festival and Competition, the 2018 incarnation of the event is set to be even more eventful and revelatory. **G**

For more details and to keep up to date with the latest plans, visit [aimf.eu](http://aimf.eu)



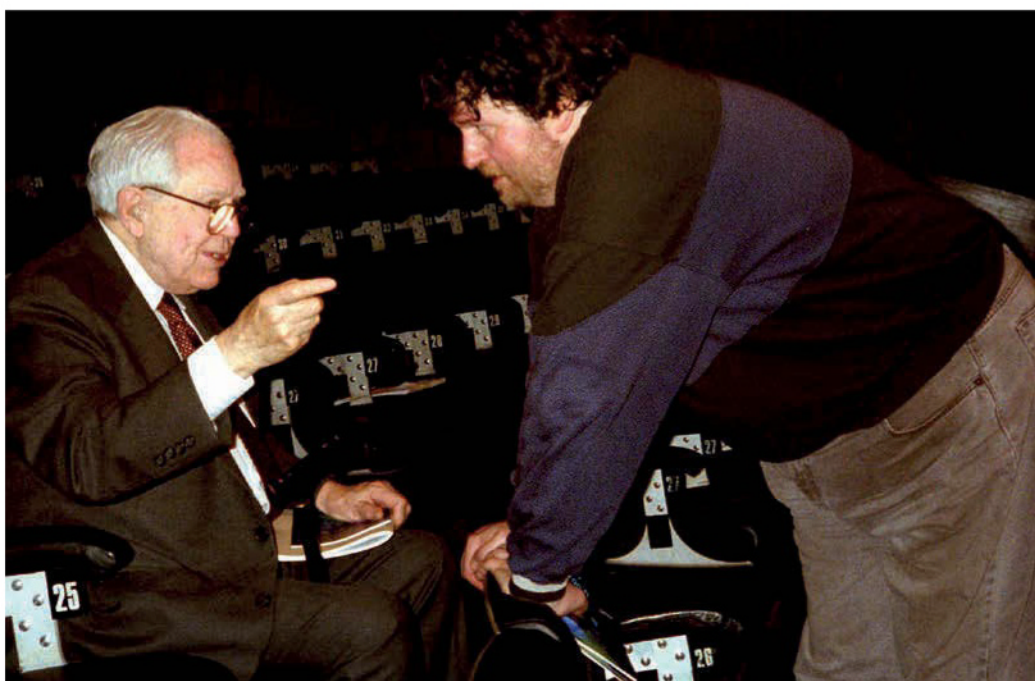
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, here with Carter at the 2009 Aldeburgh Festival, finds the late evolution of Carter's style 'just marvellous'

different speeds, and then move from one system to another ... The whole piece is built on this system of constantly switching from one speed to another, not suddenly, but like shifting gears in a car. You don't know you've gotten into a new speed until something defines it more clearly, but at the transitional moment, you don't know that it's changing.'

Carter would individualise the players to an even larger extent in his shorter Second Quartet (1959), where the musicians have distinct parts containing respective repertoires of intervals and speeds. Indeed, the four players are placed further apart from one another than in their customary seating. While each

basic musical building blocks as intervals and regular pulses to quite new ends,' he tells me. 'I was far more attracted to this more commonsensical attitude to the elements of music even in works of such great complexity as the Double Concerto and Piano Concerto, for example, than to the then-prevalent super-serial approach. I suppose one reason for the attraction is that it tied into the similarly commonsensical approach which I liked about Benjamin Britten's large-scale organisation and the way he deploys the instrumental forces in his operas – and to me at that time (though not, I'm sure, to the two gentlemen concerned) the vast difference in style wasn't at all disturbing, but complementary.'

Indeed, Carter stated on several occasions that he regarded his scores in quasi-theatrical terms, as 'auditory scenarios for the performers to act out with their instruments, dramatising the players as individuals and as participants in the ensemble'. This also applied to the manner of performance, as Oppens and clarinetist Virgil Blackwell, the founding members of the new music ensemble Speculum Musicae, recall. 'We were serious about being faithful to the composer's wishes, and the basic rule of thumb was for us to rehearse one hour for every minute of music,' explains Blackwell, who later became Carter's personal assistant and manager. 'I was struck



Collaborator and composer-conductor Oliver Knussen is attracted to Carter's 'commonsensical attitude to the elements of music'



that while Elliott notated things very meticulously, at the same time he was concerned that every gesture had to be musical. And when our singer mentioned that there were several notes not comfortable in a certain range, Elliott did not hesitate to change them on the spot.'

One suspects that even Carter's closest associates and most ardent admirers would never have imagined the composer's markedly increased productivity and evolution over the course of his final three decades. Guitarist David Starobin, for whom Carter composed *Changes* (1983) and *Shard* (1997), has suggested that *Night Fantasies* (1980), Carter's first large-scale piano composition since the Sonata, may have served as a pivot towards solo pieces for various instruments, towards a new concentration of works for diverse chamber aggregates, many of which were relatively short in duration.

Unquestionably less ambitious in scope compared to big works from the 1970s – the Third String Quartet (1971), *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1976), and *Syringa* (1978) – these short works remain comparably uncompromising and adventurous, yet arguably more fluid, with more air between the notes, and more apparent humour.

'In the fight for finding the right technique,' Aimard has said, 'one observes how, little by little with age, Carter achieves this late style where the technique is completely mastered, where it seems that he writes fluently and when the music gets this kind of freedom and transparency, and I find that this general evolution is just marvellous.' Perhaps the point wasn't so much that Carter was writing 'easier' pieces as approaching the act of composing with greater ease. 'At a certain point, Elliott began consulting pre-compositional tools such as grids and rhythmic tables or his elaborately worked-out Harmony Book less and less,' suggests Blackwell, 'He had internalised them to the point where he could sit down and write fluently.'

Carter often stated that he didn't want to repeat himself, and that was more than just his knowing response to minimalism. Despite many requests, he refused to write a Sixth String Quartet, because he felt that he had expressed everything he had wanted to express in that idiom. He increasingly turned to the concerto genre, producing works that present novel solutions of timbre and balance between soloist and orchestra. Carter's 90th-birthday year brought forth two major events. One was his first and only opera, the one-act *What Next?* – an existential comedy, with libretto by Paul Griffiths, in which six characters emerge from a car accident and try to make sense



'Every gesture had to be music': Virgil Blackwell became Carter's personal assistant

of what has happened to them and how they are related to one another.'

The other was the first integral performance, given by Knussen in Manchester, of the three movements that make up *Symphonia: sum fluxae pretium spei* (1993–36), Carter's largest orchestral work. Unusually for Carter, the second and third movements are cast in a single speed and metre, yet are not without their challenges, as Knussen explains. 'Carter's later music for orchestra may look simpler on the page, but from my performer's point of view I find it harder in some ways, because he mostly writes for each string section to play in unison, and what they have to play is often pretty taxing – whereas in the big works of the 1960s and '70s the individual parts are most often independent, which is scarier in some respects but avoids that basic issue of playing together in tune! In a way

it's a more conventional approach to the orchestra, but the music is really no less individual than before.'

One does not live forever, of course, and Carter certainly noticed the clock ticking as he approached and moved beyond his 100th birthday. 'He had discovered', Blackwell notes, 'that he could say what he wanted to say with fewer words, so to speak.' Carter's late 'mini-piano concertos' such as *Soundings* (2005), *Interventions* (2007), *Dialogues II* (2010), and *Two Controversies and a Conversation* (2011) employ brevity and fragmentation with freshness and sophistication, as do the 12 short pieces that form his last composition, *Epigrams* (2012), for piano trio. Carter may have written *Epigrams* for amusement, as he claimed, yet there's nothing remotely offhand here. That he retained his knack for experimenting, his restless creativity and his constant evolving up until the end ought to inspire and give hope to all musicians.

Yet while Carter's music enjoys wide acceptance and frequent performances five years after his death, it is not music that plays itself, nor can it be phoned in. One must commit much time and patience to mastering and communicating its technical challenges and multi-layered meanings, and the fact that so many great musicians are prepared to make that commitment is testament to its lasting fascination. The late Charles Rosen, Carter's colleague and friend, told me that those who played Carter's music did so out of compulsion, because of a desperate urge – something that Oppens can relate to. 'I'm always performing Carter, studying one of his scores or coaching students in his music,' she tells me. 'Hardly a day goes when I'm not focusing on Elliott Carter.'

▶ Read our review of Ondine's new release of late Carter works on page 50

*'My encounter with Elliott Carter's music affected my awareness of the potential of basic musical building blocks' – Oliver Knussen*



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## Disc of the Month Karłowicz / Szymanowski: Violin Concertos

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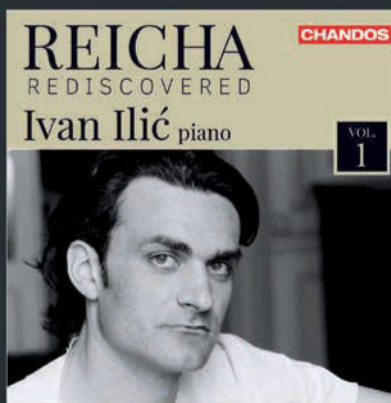


## Mozart Piano Concertos, Vol. 2

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Manchester Camerata  
Gábor Takács-Nagy

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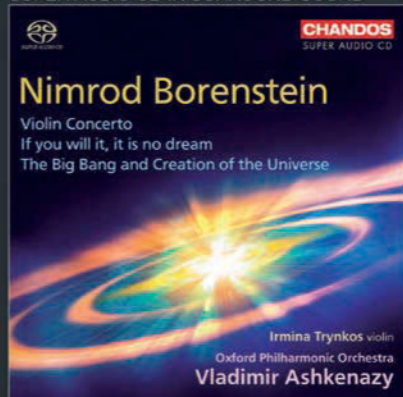
## Reicha Rediscovered Vol. 1

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# RECORD OF A LIFETIME

Gerard Schwarz is celebrating his 70th birthday with a 30-disc retrospective, and yet the conductor's desire to reach new audiences remains undimmed, finds **Andrew Farach-Colton**





Sophia Loren started it all. Gerard Schwarz was seven years old when his mother took him to see the film adaptation of Verdi's *Aida* starring the Italian actress (lip-synching for Renata Tebaldi). 'I was already taking piano lessons, but as soon as I heard the trumpet in the Triumphant March – wow! I knew that was my instrument.' This August, Schwarz turns 70, and the milestone has been an occasion for reflection. His autobiography, *Behind the Baton*, published earlier this year by Amadeus Press, traces the trajectory of his career from that eureka moment in the cinema through his appointment as co-principal trumpet of the New York Philharmonic aged 24, his 26-year tenure as Music Director of the Seattle Symphony, and the founding of the Emmy-winning All-Star Orchestra TV series.

A thread that winds continuously through Schwarz's artistic life is recording. 'My father bought me a little stereo set when I was seven or eight years old,' he tells me over coffee on a chilly March afternoon in his elegantly cozy apartment overlooking Park Avenue in Manhattan. 'This was when stereo first became available. I had a little room in our house in New Jersey, and on my shelf was this beautiful stereo set that I loved. My father enrolled me in a record club, too, and every month I'd be mailed a new record – 10-inch discs, I think they were. I'd get Beethoven's Seventh Symphony one month and a Bach orchestral suite the next. And I'd listen to these records every day, over and over.' Later, as a student at New York's High School for the Performing Arts, Schwarz became a regular customer at Sam Goody, located a few blocks away. 'In my youth, Sam Goody was the great record store. I collected trumpet records at first. I was a big jazz lover, and I bought recordings by all my favourite players: Donald Byrd, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, plus the big bands. I'd also go through the Schwann classical catalogue and get anything featuring the trumpet – *Quiet City* by Copland, for instance, or the Barber *Capricorn* Concerto. And, of course, these works would be coupled with pieces that didn't feature the trumpet, like Barber's *Adagio* and David Diamond's *Rounds*. In a way, that's how

I got to be familiar with so much American music.'

Schwarz made his first solo recording when he was 18, an album of works by Frescobaldi and Fontana entitled 'The Age of Splendour'. 'I started recording more or less as soon as I became a working, professional musician – and I've just kept going. I was eager to make records because it was something I really loved. By now I've made somewhere around 350.' He's been taking stock of his vast recorded legacy as he curates a 70th birthday, 30-disc retrospective for Naxos (although, in fact, the set encompasses his work with many different record labels). 'Growing up, I spent so much time listening to music. And, by the way, I never threw away an LP. Not a single one. My son Daniel, who's a cellist, has them all now. Anyway, my life quickly got busier. I was conducting all the time. Any listening I did was for work – for example, I'm always getting scores and recordings from composers who

want me to conduct their music. I never had the chance to listen for pleasure.'

Going back through those hundreds of recordings to put together the Naxos set has finally enabled him to do just that. 'My goal has been to include some of the works that have meant a lot to me in my life: Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* No 2, Mozart and Beethoven symphonies, some Mendelssohn, Dvořák – his Sixth Symphony, as I'm particularly pleased with that performance – and Strauss.' Schwarz says another goal was to return to circulation some key recordings that have gone out of print or were never released on CD at all. 'Most, if not all, of my trumpet records are no longer available, so I'm including a small selection, including that first album of Frescobaldi and Fontana.'

Schwarz's lifelong enthusiasm for repertoire that's neglected is well-represented in the box's contents, as well as in the exhilarated way he speaks about his choices. 'One of my very favourites is a recording of music by Andrzej Panufnik that was originally issued by JVC and has been out of print forever, it seems. And there's an LP I made for Nonesuch of concert music by Victor Herbert that's wonderful stuff. I can't understand why it never caught on. Also, a Cherubini symphony that was probably one of the best recordings I made during my time with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. Oh, and another favourite from LA is the Schreker Chamber Symphony coupled with Hindemith's *Kammermusik*, Op 24 No 1. I'm crazy for Hindemith and have no idea why he's fallen so far out of favour. In fact, after listening to it again, I rushed to pull the score down from the shelf and started studying it afresh. What he does musically is so fascinating to me.'

*'I started recording more or less as soon as I became a working, professional musician – and I've just kept going'*

Of course, a good portion of the Naxos set will be devoted to American music. 'My aim here is to focus on the composers who are important to me, and in order to give as broad a view as possible, I have mostly chosen shorter works. So, for instance, instead of one of Piston's symphonies, I put in the *New England Sketches*.' In other words, the set is a sampler, and quite the opposite of Schwarz's philosophy of concert programming. 'I've always believed that if I'm going to perform, say, 14 pieces of American music in a season, it's better to do 14 pieces by three composers than 14 pieces by 14 composers. The orchestra and the audience need to get used to a composer's musical language. And I do think it's worked. I think that's why our audience in Seattle kept growing.'

The frustration, he says, is simply that there is so much music that deserves championing. 'You want to play new music, you want to do the cutting edge, you want to give a 70th-birthday concert for John Adams, and so on. But there's always something that gets left by the wayside. Take English music, for example. It's so rarely played here in the US. I do both Walton symphonies, and Elgar and Vaughan Williams and Britten, of course. I love this repertoire. And when I used to play it in Liverpool, it was easy. The orchestra knows the music. But I programmed the Walton Second Symphony and Elgar First in Seattle, and the string players were dying because they don't know the music and, frankly, it's hard. Then again, take a great American work like William Schuman's Third Symphony. Most orchestras here don't know that either; they've never played it.





Schwarz performing Haydn's Trumpet Concerto in Aspen in 1974

Schuman is one of my absolute favourite symphonic composers. He wrote 10 symphonies – the first two he discarded, but the Third through to the Tenth are all fantastic as far as I'm concerned. They have a unique voice, a special excitement to them that I find absolutely riveting. Schuman was the President of Juilliard for many years, and then was the head of Lincoln Center. But do you ever hear his symphonies played by the New York Philharmonic, or at Juilliard, or anywhere else for that matter? No. Why? What's wrong with us?' Schwarz is the first – and, thus far, only – conductor to have recorded all of Schuman's symphonies, and he chose the Third for his birthday box. 'There's no question in my mind that my legacy is in my recordings, and especially in the American repertoire I've done. But there's still so much more to do. It's not over.'

Schwarz stepped down as Music Director of the Seattle Symphony in 2011 – he's now the orchestra's Conductor Laureate – yet is still as busy as ever. He's been composing, and is including some of his own music in the Naxos collection. 'I love to compose. When I was younger, I found it difficult because it required isolating myself. Writing music is an



Recording Beaser's The Heavenly Feast in Seattle with Constance Hauman

intensely private experience, and I wasn't that kind of person then. Now that I'm older, I have no trouble sitting alone for hours. I hear music differently when I'm thinking about my own work.' But these days, Schwarz's zeal is focused on education. He's Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival, a summer programme based in North Carolina for musicians aged 14-23. 'I'm including a live performance I did with the Festival Orchestra of the Brahms/Schoenberg Piano Quartet in the box-set. The playing is excellent and I'm so very proud of it.'

And then there's the All-Star Orchestra. Schwarz launched the project in 2013, bringing together 95 musicians from leading orchestras across the US to perform in hour-long programmes that blend concert performance and commentary – much like Bernstein's legendary Young People's Concerts – for broadcast via public television or to purchase on DVD. 'This project is what I care about the most,' Schwarz tells me. 'I'm proud of my recordings, of all the American music I've performed, of building our new concert hall in Seattle. But at the end of the day, none of this would be meaningful without listeners, without an audience. I do believe that



Gerard Schwarz's television broadcasts with his All-Star Orchestra have won six Emmys to date, introducing thousands of viewers to classical music

classical music will continue to exist, in some form or another, that it's part of the fabric of our cultural life. That being said, it's a very small part. How many people in the US appreciate classical music? Three or four per cent of the population? Yet, I believe that what we do is essential, that it's important to understand our history. And so I think that we need to expose more people to classical music. That's what we're doing with the All-Star Orchestra.'

Last year, Schwarz says, they were on public television stations for a total of 5000 hours. 'That's significant. In addition to these programmes, we've partnered with the Khan Academy, which is a free website that reaches tens of millions of students and teachers worldwide. So, as well as going online to learn about math and science, students can also learn about music – the basics of notes and rhythm, the instruments, and the literature.' And, true to form, when it comes to choosing music for the orchestra, Schwarz reaches far beyond the standard repertoire.

*'You need to establish trust so that audiences are no longer scared of composers whose names are unfamiliar'*

'I'll tell you a story,' he says with a grin. 'I decided to put Alan Hovhaness's *Mysterious Mountain* Symphony on an upcoming All-Star Orchestra programme. Let me add that this is music I use when I lecture, because the opening few minutes draw you in, so if the audience is restless, I use it to settle them down. Then I tell them how Fritz Reiner named the work and told Alan to give it the opus number 132, and how Alan replied: "Mysterious Mountain? Op 132? Alright. Sure. Great." The audience can't get over how beautiful it is. Anyway, we taped it with the All-Stars – musicians from 30 major orchestras, concertmasters and principal players from Boston, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. And afterwards, they come to me and start asking, "Why have I never played this before? Why is this music never played?" Now, remember, we're talking about Hovhaness's most famous work, recorded by Reiner and the Chicago Symphony for RCA. It's crazy. And let's say that I go to an American orchestra and tell them I want to perform Hovhaness's *Mysterious Mountain*. They'll say, "Oh, no! Do something people don't know." Well, obviously, people *don't* know it.'

Schwarz sighs and leans back in his chair. 'I'll tell you another story,' he says, more contemplatively. 'It was around 1988, I think. We had a short subscription season in Seattle back then – 12 weeks, maybe. Libby Larsen, who was the composer-in-residence in Minneapolis, contacted our composer-in-residence Stephen Albert to say that she'd done some research on all the major orchestras in the US and that Seattle did more American music than any other orchestra. So Stephen calls me. "Oh, Jerry, this is fantastic news!" he says. "We need to tell everyone. Let's put out a press release. We need to spread the word." "Don't you dare!" I told him. He was incredulous. "Why not?" he asked. I told him: "Everybody's happy. They come to the concerts. They love the music. They love *your* music, Stephen. If we boast that we're doing so much American music, they'll start complaining." And it's true. You need to establish trust so that audiences are no longer scared of composers whose names are new or unfamiliar. Then, not only do they show up for the concerts, they look forward to them.'

Gerard Schwarz's 70th birthday box-set is issued by Naxos in the autumn; his book, *'Behind the Baton'*, is reviewed on page 116

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The summer of voting is over and the long list has been narrowed down by our critics to just three recordings per category. On September 1 – at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) – we announce the winners in each category. Then, on September 13, live on [medici.tv](http://medici.tv), we name our Recording of the Year. But for now, just enjoy exploring these three dozen superb releases from the 2016-17 vintage!

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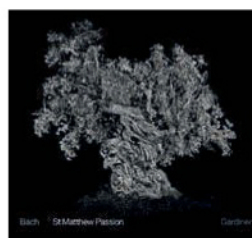
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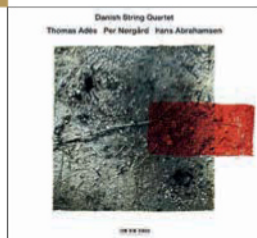
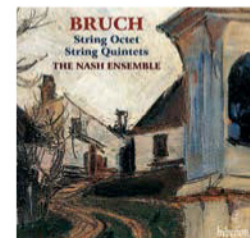


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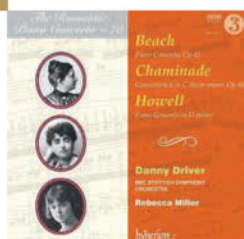
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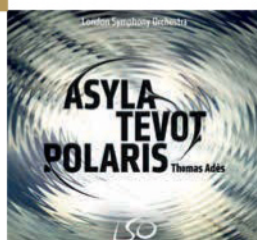
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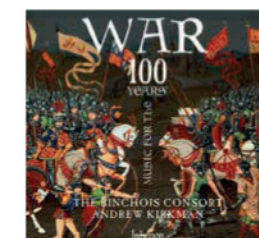
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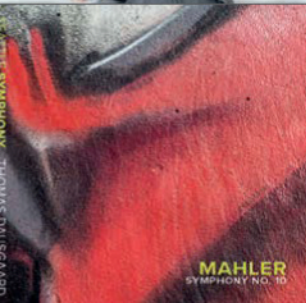
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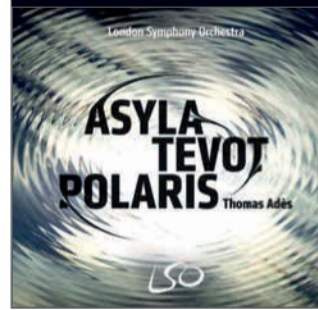
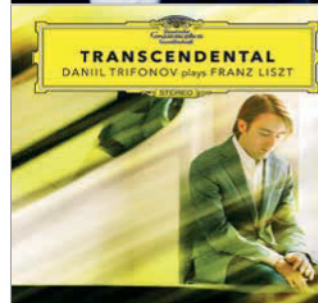
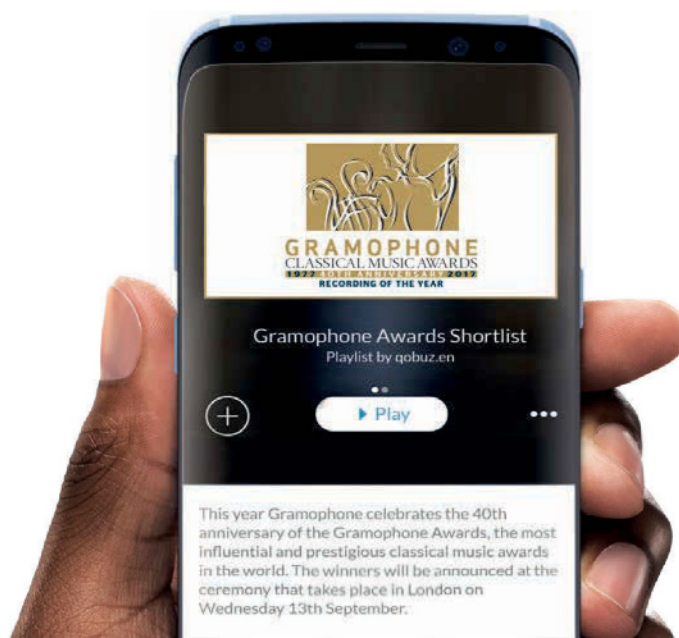


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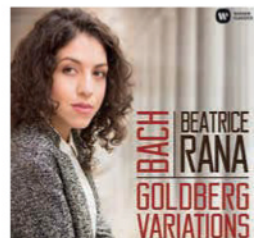


## INSTRUMENTAL

- **JS Bach** Six French Suites  
**Murray Perahia** *pf*
- **JS Bach** Goldberg Variations  
**Beatrice Rana** *pf*
- **Liszt** 'Transcendental' - Etudes d'exécution transcendante, S139. Grandes études de Paganini, S141. Concert Etudes - S144; S145  
**Daniil Trifonov** *pf*



DG (M) ②  
479 6565GH2 (11/16)



Warner Classics (F)  
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DG (M) ②  
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## OPERA

- **Berg** Wozzeck  
**Soloists; Chorus of Zurich Opera; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi**
- **Britten** The Rape of Lucretia  
**Soloists; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Hussain**
- **Goldmark** Die Königin von Saba  
**Soloists; Choruses; Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon**



Accentus (F) DVD  
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OA1219D (A/16)



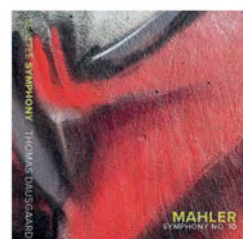
CPO (F) ③  
CPO555 013-2 (A/16)

## ORCHESTRAL

- **Haydn** Symphonies Nos 12, 60, 'Il distratto' & 70, etc  
**Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini**
- **Mahler** Symphony No 10 (performing version by Deryck Cooke)  
**Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard**
- **Sibelius** Symphonies Nos 3, 6 & 7  
**Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä**



Alpha (F) ALPHA674;  
② ● ALPHA675 (5/17)



Seattle Symphony Media  
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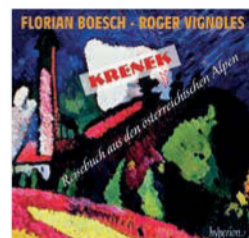
Erato (F) 9029 59284-6;  
② ● 9029 59284-1 (11/16)

## SOLO VOCAL

- **Brahms** Vier ernste Gesänge, Lieder  
**Matthias Goerne** *bar* **Christoph Eschenbach** *pf*
- **Krenek** Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen  
**Zemlinsky** Lieder  
**Florian Boesch** *bar* **Roger Vignoles** *pf*
- **'Heimat'**  
**Benjamin Appl** *bar* **James Baillieu** *pf*



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# SEASON PREVIEW 2017-18

We bring you the best live classical music events and opera productions from across the UK, Europe, North America and even further afield in our annual guide to the new concert season

## UNITED KINGDOM



Joshua Bell, artistic director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, leads his musicians in concerts of Bach and Beethoven in London, Cambridge and Iceland

### Academy of Ancient Music

The Academy's season begins with a mouthwatering opportunity to hear and see Purcell's *King Arthur* in a semi-staged concert performance under Richard Egarr. Carolyn Sampson joins Egarr and the ensemble in November for Dowland, Purcell and Handel songs, while Bernard Labadie conducts Bach's *St John Passion* in March.

[aam.co.uk](http://aam.co.uk)

### Academy of St Martin in the Fields

The Academy spends a few weeks in America this October before it

joins artistic director Joshua Bell in London, Cambridge and Iceland for concerts featuring Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Fifth Symphony, and Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No 3. In January, Bell leads a programme across the UK (plus Dublin and Germany) that includes Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Beethoven's Symphony No 2. Bell also joins two tours, to the US and Asia, in March and May.

[asmf.org](http://asmf.org)

### Aurora Orchestra

Aurora's five-year project to perform Mozart's piano concertos continues

this season, pitting Nos 8, 10 and 11 against other music by Mahler, Stravinsky and Mozart himself. The third of three late-night 'lock-in' concerts explores musical reactions to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* while the grand finale, Ligeti concertos with Patricia Kopatchinskaja, is at the Southbank.

[auroraorchestra.com](http://auroraorchestra.com)

### BBC Concert Orchestra

The highly versatile orchestra presents a varied season of film music (including the UK premiere of *Jaws in Concert* at the Royal Albert

Hall and a celebration of music for film noir at the Southbank Centre), plus an appearance at the EFG London Jazz Festival in the form of Joe Zawinul's *Stories of the Danube*.  
[bbc.co.uk/concertorchestra](http://bbc.co.uk/concertorchestra)

### BBC National Orchestra of Wales

BBC NOW turns 90 at the end of the season and, in celebration, revives a number of works it has commissioned over the years. The orchestra presents major scores by Shostakovich, Sibelius, Brahms and Mendelssohn, and also launches a two-year Beethoven symphony

cycle and collaborates with National Dance Company Wales on a production of Satie's *Parade*.

[bbc.co.uk/bbcnow](http://bbc.co.uk/bbcnow)

### BBC Philharmonic

Juanjo Mena presides over his last season as chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic, opening with Mahler's Third Symphony and closing with an all-Spanish programme to include Falla's one-act opera *La vida breve*. Season highlights include the UK premieres of Wolfgang Rihm's Horn Concerto and Rodion Shchedrin's *Dialogues with Shostakovich*, plus the world premiere of Mark Simpson's new Cello Concerto.

[bbc.co.uk/philharmonic](http://bbc.co.uk/philharmonic)

### BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

In its Composer Roots series curated by chief conductor Thomas Dausgaard, the BBC SSO examines the musical influences that shaped the works of Beethoven, Rachmaninov, Bartók, Nielsen and Sibelius – including the indigenous folk music on which those composers fed. New works by Anna Clyne, David Fennessy and William Sweeney explores the theme of Scottish identity.

[bbc.co.uk/bbcsso](http://bbc.co.uk/bbcsso)

### BBC Singers

The ensemble's Total Immersion series continues with a focus on Julian Anderson in October and Leonard Bernstein in January, both at St Giles Cripplegate. In February, there are two highlights: Bach's *St Matthew Passion* at Milton Court and, with the BBC SO and Chorus at the Barbican, the UK premiere of Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* starring Joyce DiDonato.

[bbc.co.uk/singers](http://bbc.co.uk/singers)

### BBC Symphony Orchestra

Sakari Oramo conducts the complete Sibelius symphonies with his orchestra to mark 100 years since Finland achieved independence. Martyn Brabbins hops over from ENO to conduct Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* prefaced by Birtwistle's *Earth Dances*. The annual Total Immersion weekend alights upon the music of Julian Anderson while the music and career of Esa-Pekka Salonen is also profiled.

[bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra](http://bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra)



CBSO music director Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla leads a performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande*

### Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

A big statement opens the BSO's new season in Poole: Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* under the baton of chief conductor Kirill Karabits. He also continues his exploration of Bruckner, Mahler and Schumann symphonies, while a Tchaikovsky strand places the symphonies alongside related and contemporary works. Andreas Ottensamer, principal clarinet of the Berlin Philharmonic, is artist-in-residence for the season.

[bsolive.com](http://bsolive.com)

### Britten Sinfonia

In Cambridgeshire and at the Barbican, Britten Sinfonia begins a three-year project to perform the Beethoven symphonies alongside works by the Irish composer Gerald Barry, all conducted by Thomas Adès. Britten Sinfonia's At Lunch series continues in Norwich and Cambridge and weaves its way into the orchestra's learning programme.

[brittensinfonia.com](http://brittensinfonia.com)

### City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

The clarinetist, conductor, composer and contemporary music dynamo Jörg Widmann joins the CBSO as artist-in-residence for the season, directing and playing his own works in addition to those by Weber and Mozart. The orchestra premieres Gerald Barry's new Organ Concerto while a Debussy festival in March concludes with music director Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla conducting a concert performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

[cbsco.co.uk](http://cbsco.co.uk)

### City of London Sinfonia

CLS's Modern Mystics series gets underway with a performance of music by spiritually inclined composers Vasks, Pärt and Tabakova at Southwark Cathedral. The series continues with an intriguing meeting of Howard Skempton, Jonathan Harvey, Richard Causton and Julian Anderson at Village Underground in Shoreditch, conducted by Jessica Cottis. The high point of the orchestra's autumn season is a performance of Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* with cellist Matthew Barley at St John's Smith Square.

[cityoflondonsinfonia.co.uk](http://cityoflondonsinfonia.co.uk)

### Classical Opera

For 2018, Classical Opera's ongoing focus on the music of Mozart alights on the year 1768, presenting symphonies by the composer and his senior, Haydn, at Wigmore Hall, and a performance of Haydn's one-act cantata *Applausus* at Cadogan Hall. There's also a concert presentation of Mozart's opera *La finta semplice* at Birmingham Town Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London.

[classicalopera.co.uk](http://classicalopera.co.uk)

### English Concert

Harry Bicket celebrates 10 years as artistic director of The English Concert with concert performance of Handel's *Rinaldo*, which tours to Seville, Madrid, London and New York. Kristian Bezuidenhout joins the ensemble as principal guest conductor, exploring chamber music and classical keyboard repertoire. In the UK, the ensemble visits Oxford, Taunton, Bath and Manchester in

addition to London's Wigmore Hall and Milton Court.

[englishconcert.co.uk](http://englishconcert.co.uk)

### English National Opera

ENO welcomes its new music director Martyn Brabbins for his first full season in charge, during which he conducts Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Marnie*, a new opera by Nico Muhly. ENO's artistic director Daniel Kramer directs his first opera at the Coliseum since starting the job, a new production of *La traviata*. There are also new productions of Verdi's *Aida* and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*.

[eno.org](http://eno.org)

### English Touring Opera

ETO's autumn season is an all-Baroque affair presented in tandem with the Baroque ensemble, Old Street Band. The company presents Handel's *Giulio Cesare* complete but split across two evenings, alongside Rameau's *Dardanus* and Bach's B minor Mass with local choirs. ETO's trucks will roll through the UK from Exeter to Durham via Bath, Sheffield, London and elsewhere.

[englishtouringopera.org.uk](http://englishtouringopera.org.uk)

### Hallé Orchestra

The Hallé's multi-season *Ring* cycle concludes at the end of the season, as Mark Elder presides over a performance of *Siegfried* starring Simon O'Neill. Elsewhere, the Manchester orchestra offers a Russian thread from the Romantics of the 19th century to the iconic composers of the Soviet era. A notable highlight promises to be the return of Sunwook Kim as soloist in Brahms's Piano Concerto No 1, following his recording of the piece with the same forces.

[halle.co.uk](http://halle.co.uk)

### Kings Place

The venue's 2018 series Time Unwrapped explores how music can stretch time, reverse it and suspend it altogether. Beginning with Haydn's *Creation* and ending with Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, it features ensembles such as Aurora Orchestra and London Sinfonietta, with Hugo Ticciati as artist-in-residence. Prior to this, Cello Unwrapped continues with two Bach Cello Suites concerts from Natalie Clein and Pieter Wispelwey.

[kingsplace.co.uk](http://kingsplace.co.uk)





**Trouble in Tahiti:** Bernstein's one-act opera is one of six one-acters being performed in rotating configurations by Opera North

### London Philharmonic Orchestra

Vladimir Jurowski celebrates 10 years at the helm of the LPO by launching a *Ring* cycle that will continue through future seasons. Jurowski also conducts Enescu's opera *Oedipe* and preside over the Changing Faces: Stravinsky's Journey series, which charts the composer's style and spans the whole of 2018. Conductors Alondra de la Parra and Antonio Pappano also make their LPO debuts.

[lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)

### London Sinfonietta

As part of Unfinished Business, its 50th anniversary season, the London Sinfonietta revives one of its most significant commissions: *Voices*, written by Hans Werner Henze for the orchestra in 1973; David Atherton conducts. Turning Points celebrates the music of Luciano Berio while the half-century anniversary concert itself, in January, includes the London premiere of Hans Abrahamsen's concerto, *Left, alone*, for piano left hand and orchestra.

[londonsinfonietta.org.uk](http://londonsinfonietta.org.uk)

### London Symphony Orchestra

The long-awaited arrival of new principal conductor Simon Rattle launches with a bang in the form of a 10-day This Is Rattle festival, to include works by Stravinsky and a concert performance of Berlioz's *La*

*damnation de Faust*. The LSO also marks the Bernstein and Debussy centenaries while principal guest conductor Gianandrea Noseda presides over a Shostakovich symphony cycle.

[lso.co.uk](http://lso.co.uk)

### Manchester Camerata

The season highlight for the only orchestra with 'Manchester' in its title is a performance of Mozart's Requiem under music director Gábor Takács-Nagy at Bridgewater Hall. Elsewhere in the Camerata's increasingly off-piste calendar, Tine Thing Helseth returns for a special performance on International Women's Day and former Stone Roses collaborator Aziz Ibrahim draws on his South Asian roots for a project called *From Lahore to Longsight*, as part of the orchestra's UpClose series.

[manchestercamerata.com](http://manchestercamerata.com)

### Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists

Following appearances at the Edinburgh and Lucerne festivals this August, there are concerts in Germany, Poland, France, Italy and the US, where the focus remains the Monteverdi 450 anniversary celebrations. The performances include *L'Orfeo*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and *Vespers*.

[monteverdi.co.uk](http://monteverdi.co.uk)

### National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain

The NYO's autumn tour takes the orchestra to Nottingham, Birmingham and the Royal Festival Hall in London, where John Wilson takes charge of the most talented instrumentalists of tomorrow. On the programme is Brett Dean's *Komarov's Fall*, Lauren Marshall's *Suspended Between Earth and Air*, Szymanowski's Symphony No 4 and Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2.

[nyo.org.uk](http://nyo.org.uk)

### Opera North

The Leeds company's Little Greats series starts the season with six one-act operas in rotating configurations; the works include Janáček's *Osud* and Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*. Tim Albery unveils a new production of *Un ballo in maschera*, the company's first, and sees his *Madama Butterfly* revived. *Salome* and *Billy Budd* are presented in concert, the latter at Aldeburgh.

[operanorth.co.uk](http://operanorth.co.uk)

### Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

The OAE's Illusions, Visions, Delusions series opens with Sally Beamish's brand-new work *The Judas Passion* under Nicholas McGegan at St John's Smith Square, and continues with a concert performance of Handel's *Semele* under Ivor Bolton at the Royal Festival Hall. Other season

strands and highlights include Bach cantatas and *St Matthew Passion*, and Haydn's *Creation* and *Harmoniemesse*.

[oae.co.uk](http://oae.co.uk)

### Philharmonia Orchestra

A decade on from the reopening of the Royal Festival Hall, the Philharmonia marks the same milestone with chief conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen and reopens the newly refurbished Queen Elizabeth Hall on Salonen's 60th birthday, June 30, 2018. The music of Soviet Russia dominates the season under Salonen and Vladimir Ashkenazy, while the orchestra marks 100 years of Finnish independence with Sibelius and Finnish folk music.

[philharmonia.co.uk](http://philharmonia.co.uk)

### Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

A strand labelled From the New World will see the Merseyside orchestra perform works by composers born in America, or who emigrated there, or felt the influence of the country's own music – works by Bernstein, Kernis, Dvořák, Glass and more are included. In other highlights, Stephen Hough plays all five Beethoven piano concertos in chronological order, Bryn Terfel sings *Falstaff* and Verdi's Requiem, and Vasily Petrenko conducts Messiaen's *Turangallia-Symphonie*.

[liverpoolphil.com](http://liverpoolphil.com)

### Royal Opera House

Stefan Herheim's thrilling production of Verdi's grand opera in the French style *Les vêpres siciliennes* opens the season, with a cast including Brian Hymel and Erwin Schrott. Joyce DiDonato takes the title-role in Rossini's epic rarity *Semiramide* in a production new to London by David Alden. Richard Jones's landmark staging of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* returns after more than a decade.

[roh.org.uk](http://roh.org.uk)

### Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

A rare outing for John Ireland's Piano Concerto leaps out of the RPO's Cadogan Hall series, performed by pianist Mark Bebbington under Barry Wordsworth. Cellos loom large over at the orchestra's Royal Festival Hall series, where Steven Isserlis plays Elgar's Cello Concerto under ►



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The Sixteen shift their attention to the sacred and secular music of Cornysh and Britten for their Choral Pilgrimage in 2018

Thomas Dausgaard and principal conductor Charles Dutoit conducts Strauss's *Don Quixote* featuring soloist Alban Gerhardt.

[rpo.co.uk](http://rpo.co.uk)

### Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Celebrating 175 years of the RSNO Chorus, the RSNO joins its sister organisation in performances of Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, Holst's *The Planets*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and the Scottish premiere of his *Mass*. The American focus continues with further works by Bernstein and the UK premiere of Jennifer Higdon's Tuba Concerto. Roger Norrington joins the orchestra to launch a multi-season cycle of the Schumann symphonies.

[rsno.org.uk](http://rsno.org.uk)

### Saffron Hall

Visitors to Saffron Hall can savour a handful of performances from the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, who present, among other works, Sally Beamish's new creation *The Judas Passion*. Visiting symphony orchestras include the LSO and CBSO, the latter under chief conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. The Saffron Opera Group presents the culmination of its much-discussed *Ring* cycle.

[saffronhall.com](http://saffronhall.com)

### Sage Gateshead/ Northern Sinfonia

The backbone of the Royal Northern Sinfonia's new season is an exploration of the music of Bach and its legacy, while the orchestra also presents a cycle of Mendelssohn's symphonies under its chief conductor Lars Vogt. Visiting orchestras include the Hallé, Brussels Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, while The Sixteen and Opera North supply vocal treats.

[sagegateshead.com](http://sagegateshead.com)

### St John's Smith Square

SJSS continues to stand in for the Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall (under refurbishment until the end of the season) and therefore hosts not just the QEH's resident orchestra the OAE, but also the International Piano Series. In addition, watch out for a major Americana strand and the debut from a brand-new period-instrument orchestra, Wond'rous Machine.

[sjss.org.uk](http://sjss.org.uk)

### Scottish Chamber Orchestra

Robert Ticciati's last season in charge comprises two principal strands: The Magic of Dvořák (to include concertos, symphonies and the *Biblical Songs*) and American

Masterworks (which involves music by Copland, Barber, Bernstein and Adams). The SCO Chorus join the orchestra for Schumann's *Requiem* and Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.

[sco.org.uk](http://sco.org.uk)

### Scottish Opera

David McVicar's *La traviata* returns, followed by new productions: *Flight* by Jonathan Dove and *Greek* by Mark-Anthony Turnage. Thomas Allen joins the cast for a new production of Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* in partnership with Opera Holland Park, and Oliver Mears directs a new staging of *Eugene Onegin*. A new Bill Banks-Jones production of *Pagliacci*, staged in a movable tent, ends the season.

[scottishopera.org.uk](http://scottishopera.org.uk)

### The Sixteen

The Choral Pilgrimage shifts its focus to Cornysh and Britten in 2018, while its residency at Wigmore Hall continues with concerts in October, January and June. In February, The Sixteen embark on a UK tour of Vivaldi's *Gloria*, complete with its own period-instrument orchestra.

[thesixteen.com](http://thesixteen.com)

### Stoller Hall, Manchester

Manchester's newest performance space, which opened at Chetham's

School of Music in April, is hosting its first season. Highlights include: performances and masterclasses by Tasmin Little and Stephen Hough; Russian October – a month of events marking the centenary of the Russian Revolution; and recitals from the Heath and Kuss Quartets.

[stollerhall.com](http://stollerhall.com)

### Turner Sims, Southampton

Standout performances include a recital by Chloë Hanslip and Danny Driver and an appearance by Emma Johnson (both October). The season also features an eight-recital piano series that welcomes Cédric Tiberghien, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Marc-André Hamelin and Imogen Cooper – the latter presents three concerts exploring the music of Beethoven and Haydn.

[turnersims.co.uk](http://turnersims.co.uk)

### Ulster Orchestra

Chief conductor Rafael Payare opens the season with the First Symphonies of Beethoven and Mahler. Later on, Esther Yoo plays Sibelius's Violin Concerto, and Simon Trpčeski continues the orchestra's Great Concertos series with a performance of Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Soloist Pacho Flores performs the world premiere of Giancarlo Castro's Trumpet Concerto (Payare conducts).

[ulsterorchestra.org.uk](http://ulsterorchestra.org.uk)

### Welsh National Opera

WNO's autumn season marks 100 years since the Russian Revolution with Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* and the premiere of a new critical edition of Janáček's *From the House of the Dead*. The spring season, Rabble Rousers, launches a new series of Verdi operas all staged with the same basic stage machinery, beginning with *La forza del destino*.

[wno.org.uk](http://wno.org.uk)

### Wigmore Hall

Isabelle Faust, Christian Tetzlaff, András Schiff, Jörg Widmann and Sonia Prina are all resident in the coming season. The Casals Quartet present the complete Beethoven quartets, while vocalists Mark Padmore, Roderick Williams, Sarah Connolly and Simon Keenlyside also make an appearance.

[wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk)

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FRIDAY 6 OCTOBER 2017

## Basel Symphony Orchestra

Oliver Schnyder PIANO | Ivor Bolton CONDUCTOR

Busoni | Mozart | Beethoven

SUNDAY 8 & MONDAY 9 OCTOBER 2017

## Mariinsky Orchestra

Kristóf Baráti VIOLIN | Valery Gergiev CONDUCTOR

Rimsky-Korsakov | Stravinsky

MONDAY 16 OCTOBER 2017

## St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra

Peter Donohoe PIANO | Alexander Dmitriev CONDUCTOR

Tchaikovsky | Rachmaninov

WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2017

## Brussels Philharmonic

Nicolaj Znaider VIOLIN | Stéphane Denève CONDUCTOR

Mark-Anthony Turnage | Bruch | Prokofiev | Ravel

MONDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2017

## Basel Chamber Orchestra

Stephen Hough PIANO | Heinz Holliger CONDUCTOR

Mendelssohn | Heinz Holliger | Schubert

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2017

## NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover

Lars Vogt PIANO | Andrew Manze CONDUCTOR

Beethoven | Brahms

THURSDAY 1 MARCH 2018

## Russian State Philharmonic

Valentina Lisitsa PIANO | Valery Polyansky CONDUCTOR

Khachaturian | Rachmaninov | Tchaikovsky

FRIDAY 16 MARCH 2018

## SWR Symphony Orchestra Stuttgart

Francesco Piemontesi PIANO | Sir Roger Norrington CONDUCTOR

Beethoven

MONDAY 16 & WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL 2018

## Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Pavel Kolesnikov PIANO | Barry Douglas PIANO

Petr Altrichter CONDUCTOR

Schubert | Beethoven | Dvořák

THURSDAY 3 MAY 2018

## Bruckner Orchester Linz

Bournemouth Symphony Chorus

Markus Poschner CONDUCTOR

Mahler SYMPHONY NO. 2 (RESURRECTION)

THURSDAY 17 MAY 2018

## Flanders Symphony Orchestra

Pavel Kolesnikov PIANO | Jan Latham Koenig CONDUCTOR

Dvořák | Beethoven | Sibelius | Grieg

TUESDAY 22 MAY 2018

## Dresden Philharmonic

Arabella Steinbacher VIOLIN | Michael Sanderling CONDUCTOR

Weber | Tchaikovsky | Shostakovich

THURSDAY 31 MAY 2018

## Brussels Philharmonic

Liza Ferschtman VIOLIN | Stéphane Denève CONDUCTOR

Bernstein | Prokofiev

WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE 2018

## Würth Philharmonic Orchestra

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## EUROPE



The new season at Barcelona's Grand Teatre del Liceu opens with a revival of Emilio Sago's staging of Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*

### Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Rome

Antonio Pappano opens the season at Rome's Parco della Musica with a concert performance of Szymanowski's *King Roger* and continues with Borodin's Second, Bernstein's Third and Mahler's Sixth and Ninth Symphonies. Guest conductors include Vasily Petrenko, Mikko Franck, Manfred Honeck, Myung-Whun Chung, Semyon Bychkov, Yuri Temirkanov, and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla who conducts Debussy's *La mer*.

[santacecilia.it](http://santacecilia.it)

### Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

The season in Munich opens with Leif Ove Andsnes's performance of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 4 framed by Sibelius's *En Saga* and Symphony No 1, conducted by Dima Slobodeniouk. The Nordic theme continues with visits from Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting music from Finland new and old, before Mariss Jansons returns the orchestra to its roots with a celebration of the music of Richard Strauss.

[br-so.com](http://br-so.com)

### Bavarian State Opera

Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* opens the season under Kirill Petrenko's baton. New productions to watch out for include Amélie Niermeyer's *La favorita* (Donizetti), Harry Kupfer's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (Shostakovich), and Lotte de Beer's *Il trittico* (Puccini). David Alden's *Semiramide*, Robert Carsen's *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Andreas Kriegenburg's *Ring* cycle are among the revivals.

[staatsoper.de](http://staatsoper.de)

### Bergen Philharmonic

A focus on the piano concerto sees performances from Bergen-resident Leif Ove Andsnes in Rachmaninov as well as the Norwegian premiere of Julian Anderson's new concerto by Scottish pianist Steven Osborne. Thomas Dausgaard joins the orchestra for a cycle of the Bruckner symphonies to be recorded for BIS, while music director Edward Gardner conducts *Peter Grimes* in concert.

[harmonien.no](http://harmonien.no)

### Berlin Philharmonic

Simon Rattle's final season at the helm of this iconic orchestra

includes performances of two of his most beloved oratorios, Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* and Haydn's *The Creation*. He also takes charge of Mahler's Symphony No 6, the 2012 completion of Bruckner's Symphony No 9 and concert performances of Wagner's *Parsifal* and Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*.

[berliner-philharmoniker.de](http://berliner-philharmoniker.de)

### Czech Philharmonic

Some rearranging is necessary for the new season following the sad death of the orchestra's music director, Jiří Bělohlávek, in the spring. Scheduled concerts that remain unchanged include Jakub Hrůša conducting Bernstein and Martinů and performances of the Bernstein, Berg and Sibelius violin concertos featuring soloists Vadim Gluzman, Isabelle Faust and Janine Jansen respectively.

[ceskafilharmonie.cz](http://ceskafilharmonie.cz)

### Danish National Symphony Orchestra

In his second season in charge of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Fabio Luisi conducts

Schmidt's *The Book with Seven Seals*, as well as a raft of symphonies: Nielsen's Fifth, Bruckner's Seventh, Mahler's Eighth, and Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh. James MacMillan visits Copenhagen to conduct his own *St Luke Passion*, Herbert Blomstedt conducts Mendelssohn's 'Scottish' Symphony and Marcus Creed takes charge of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*.

[drkoncerthuset.dk/dr-symfoni-orkestret](http://drkoncerthuset.dk/dr-symfoni-orkestret)

### Deutsche Oper Berlin

Donald Runnicles opens the season with two Wagner masterworks, *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* in productions by Christian Spuck and Kasper Holten respectively. New productions include Olivier Py's staging of Meyerbeer's *Le prophète*, Christof Loy's directing of Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* and Jan Bosse's staging of Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*. Watch out for rising star Evan Rogister conducting a revival of Claus Guth's *Salome*.

[deutscheoperberlin.de](http://deutscheoperberlin.de)

### Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie, Bremen

Alondra de la Parra opens the season with a concert that includes Prokofiev's Symphony No 1, Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* Suite and Ginastera's *Variaciones concertantes*. Before Christmas there are visits from Trevor Pinnock, Maria João Pires and Pekka Kuusisto while music director Paavo Järvi takes charge of Brahms's Fourth Symphony and Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2, the latter under the fingers of Viktoria Mullova.

[kammerphilharmonie.com](http://kammerphilharmonie.com)

### Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg

Hamburg's new venue celebrates the city's second most famous musical son (after Brahms, that is!) with a Telemann Festival in November and December. After Christmas comes a celebration of Bohemian music in the series Czech it Out, while the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra's Concerts for Hamburg continue with Thomas Hengelbrock taking the helm for repertoire from the Classical era to the present day.

[elbphilharmonie.de](http://elbphilharmonie.de)

**Gewandhaus Orchestra, Leipzig**

It's a big season for the Gewandhaus Orchestra, which celebrates 275 years and welcomes Andris Nelsons as Kapellmeister. Jörg Widmann also becomes the first ever Gewandhaus Composer. Nelsons conducts new works by Thomas Larcher and Wolfgang Rihm alongside great works from the central European canon. The orchestra also marks the 90th birthday of former Kapellmeister Herbert Blomstedt. [gewandhausorchester.de](http://gewandhausorchester.de)

**Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra**

A free concert at Gothenburg's culture festival marks the arrival of the GSO's new chief conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali, who seals his arrival days later with a performance of Sibelius's *Kullervo*. The Finnish composer looms large in the conductor's first season, but a residency from Hélène Grimaud offers a southern European counterpoint, while Kent Nagano returns to preside over Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*. [gso.se](http://gso.se)

**Gran Teatre del Liceu**

The Barcelona season opens with a revival of Emilio Sago's staging of Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, while Donizetti dominates the rest of the season with performances of *L'elisir d'amore*, *Poliuto* and *La favorite*, the latter conducted by Patrick Summers. Other highlights include David McVicar's staging of Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* conducted by Josep Pons. [liceubarcelona.cat](http://liceubarcelona.cat)

**Hungarian State Opera**

Due to Opera House renovations, the 2017/18 season opens at the Erkel Theatre, but it's still offering a busy programme. New productions include *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Les huguenots*, *Oberon* and *Salome*. In November there's a performance of Verdi's Requiem as well as *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Nabucco*. [opera.hu](http://opera.hu)

**Iceland Symphony Orchestra**

Principal conductor Yan-Pascal Tortelier's concerts include

Lutoslawski's Concerto for Orchestra, Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, Beethoven's Symphony No 5 and repertoire from Tortelier's native France including Gounod's Symphony No 1, Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos, Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Ravel's *La valse* and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Principal guest conductor Osmo Vänskä takes care of Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony. [en.sinfonia.is](http://en.sinfonia.is)

**Insula Orchestra**

Insula beds into its Paris home, La Seine Musicale, with a collaborative realisation in September of Goethe and Beethoven's *Egmont*, for which Laurence Equilbey's ensemble performs in a staged production by Séverine Chavrier. Other highlights include, for International Women's Day on March 8, a performance of music by Louise Farrenc at the Barbican, and, in June, back in Paris, a staged production of the play *Thamos, King of Egypt* featuring Mozart's incidental music. [insulaorchestra.fr](http://insulaorchestra.fr)

**Les Talens Lyriques**

Christophe Rousset leads his period-instrument ensemble in performances across Europe. Operas include Lully's *Alceste*, ou *Le Triomphe d'Alcide*, Rameau's *Et in Arcadia ego* and Gounod's *Faust* (at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées), while concerts include a Couperin programme in London and 'Telemann et la France' in Germany and Belgium. The ensemble also performs 'Love and Death in Venice' at Wigmore Hall in February. [lestalenslyriques.com](http://lestalenslyriques.com)

**Luxembourg Philharmonic**

The Philharmonic's roster of visiting orchestras remains as impressive as ever, with concerts from the London Symphony Orchestra, Estonian Festival Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris and Philharmonia. The resident Orchestre Philharmonique de Luxembourg presents a varied programme under music director Gustavo Gimeno and a range of guest conductors, including Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony and Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie*. [philharmonie.lu](http://philharmonie.lu)

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Laurence Equilbey conducts the Insula Orchestra in Gounod's *La nonne sanglante*, part of the sixth Festival Palazzetto Bru Zane

### Mariinsky Theatre

Fans of Rimsky-Korsakov won't be disappointed to see *Sadko*, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh*, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, *The Snow Maiden*, *The Maid of Pskov* and *The Golden Cockerel* on the bill. New productions include Arnaud Bernard's staging of Verdi's *Les vêpres siciliennes* and a new version of Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* from Isabelle Partiot-Pieri; Valery Gergiev conducts both.

[mariinsky.ru/en](http://mariinsky.ru/en)

### Munich Philharmonic

Music director Valery Gergiev opens proceedings in Munich with something of a Bruckner-fest, including the composer's First, Fourth and Seventh Symphonies. Other notable events include Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* conducted by Ton Koopman, and Gergiev's concert performances of Rodion Shchedrin's *The Enchanted Wanderer* and Wagner's similarly themed *Der fliegende Holländer*.

[mphil.de](http://mphil.de)

### Müpa Budapest

Ensembles visiting Müpa's Béla Bartók National Concert Hall include the Vienna, Hamburg and Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestras with Pinchas Zuckerman and Leonidas Kavakos among the soloists. Daniel

Roth comes to play the hall's grand organ, while there are vocal recitals from Jonas Kaufmann, Diana Damrau, Camilla Nylund and Cantamus Chamber Choir.

[mupa.hu](http://mupa.hu)

### Opéra de Paris

Standout events in the coming season include Peter Sellars's production of Kaija Saariaho's new opera *Only the Sound Remains*, Richard Jones's new *Parsifal* conducted by Philippe Jordan, and Claus Guth's new staging of Handel's *Jephtha* conducted by William Christie. Elsewhere, Gustavo Dudamel makes a rare appearance for Guth's production of *La bohème*, while Vladimir Jurowski conducts a new production of *Boris Godounov*.

[operadeparis.fr](http://operadeparis.fr)

### Orchestre de Paris

Daniel Harding opens the season at the Philharmonie de Paris with Mahler's Sixth Symphony shortly before conducting a concert performance of Verdi's *Falstaff* as part of the venue's Shakespeare weekend. Other highlights include Herbert Blomstedt's performance of Bruckner's Third Symphony and Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* under Wayne Marshall.

[orchestredeparis.com](http://orchestredeparis.com)

### Oslo Philharmonic

Chief conductor Vasily Petrenko's ongoing Scriabin project arrives at the outlandish composer's Symphony No 5, which is also being issued on a LAWO Classics recording. Elsewhere, Alan Gilbert conducts an all-British programme with Leif Ove Andsnes playing Britten's Piano Concerto; Joshua Weilerstein conducts Mahler's First Symphony; and Nathalie Stutzmann features in Handel's *Messiah*.

[ofo.no](http://ofo.no)

### Palau de la Música

Visitors to the Catalan concert hall in the new season include Bryn Terfel, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Radu Lupu and Anne Sofie von Otter. John Eliot Gardiner tours to the venue with the London Symphony Orchestra, Zubin Mehta brings musicians across the Mediterranean from Florence and John Adams conducts his own music with the resident Barcelona Symphony Orchestra.

[palaumusica.cat](http://palaumusica.cat)

### Palazzetto Bru Zane

The Venice-based institution which promotes French Romantic music marks the bicentenary of Gounod throughout 2018 with concerts in Munich, Venice, Paris and London. A highlight is *La nonne sanglante* (June 2-12), part of the sixth Festival

Palazzetto Bru Zane in Paris, performed by the Insula Orchestra and conducted by Laurence Equilbey. International Women's Day, meanwhile, is the inspiration for a recital in Venice that pays tribute to Nadia and Lili Boulanger.

[bru-zane.com](http://bru-zane.com)

### Pierre Boulez Saal

The first full season at Daniel Barenboim's new Berlin concert hall 'in the round' welcomes artists-in-residence the Belcea Quartet, Jörg Widmann, Till Brönner and Avi Avital. There are piano recitals from Uchida, Barenboim, Aimard, Lupu and Schiff, and visits from ensembles including RIAS Chamber Choir and the String Quartet of Barenboim's 'orchestra next door', the Staatskapelle Berlin. A host of vocalists grace the hall to perform Schubert's complete songs.

[boulezsaal.de](http://boulezsaal.de)

### RCO Amsterdam

The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's music director Daniele Gatti immerses himself in Bruckner from the start of the new season, while Andrew Manze makes his debut directing an eclectic programme including Beethoven's First Symphony and a new work by Anders Hillborg. Soprano Eva-Maria Westbroek is the season's artist-in-residence, while Philippe Herreweghe returns to take charge of Bach's B minor Mass.

[concertgebouwworkset.nl](http://concertgebouwworkset.nl)

### Royal Stockholm Philharmonic

The season opens with Manfred Honeck's take on Bruckner's Ninth, which is not the only Ninth in the RSPO's season - Schubert's features, too, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach, along with Beethoven's under Franz Welser-Möst. Look out for a festival of Stravinsky's music, and another of HK Gruber's, plus visits from Riccardo Muti, Herbert Blomstedt and Janine Jansen.

[konserthuset.se](http://konserthuset.se)

### RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra

Nathalie Stutzmann joins the RTÉ NSO as principal guest conductor from the start of the new season, conducting five concerts in Dublin to include the Brahms Violin Concerto, First Symphonies by Prokofiev and Beethoven, Mozart's

Requiem and Beethoven's Ninth. The orchestra celebrates its 70th anniversary with works by Irish composers including Gerald Barry and Micheál Ó Súilleabháin.  
**orchestras.rte.ie**

#### St Petersburg Philharmonia

Yuri Temirkanov opens the season with the orchestra Shostakovich knew so well in a programme consisting entirely of the composer's music, culminating in his First Symphony. Elsewhere Charles Dutoit conducts Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, and the orchestra presents its traditional New Year's concerts and offers a tantalising exploration of Baroque music courtesy of Dmitry Sinkovsky.  
**philharmonia.spb.ru/en**

#### Semperoper Dresden

The Semperoper salutes the Bernstein centenary year with a new production of *Trouble in Tahiti* from Manfred Weiss and also presents new productions of Korngold's *Die tote Stadt*, Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Dallapiccola's *Il prigioniero*. Willy Decker's *Ring* is presented as a full cycle in the winter, conducted by Christian Thielemann.  
**semperoper.de**

#### Staatskapelle Dresden

Christian Thielemann and the Staatskapelle welcome artist-in-residence Denis Matsuev, who plays concertos by Liszt and Shostakovich as well as solo piano works by Schumann, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov. Composer-in-residence is Arvo Pärt, while Thielemann conducts a wealth of works in the central European tradition, including Mahler's mammoth Third Symphony, featuring mezzo-soprano soloist Elina Garanča.  
**staatskapelle-dresden.de**

#### Suisse Romande Orchestra

Jonathan Nott takes charge of his first full season as music director of the OSR, saluting the orchestra's French credentials by opening with an all-Ravel programme including the complete *Daphnis et Chloé*. Elsewhere, Peter Eötvös conducts the Swiss premiere of his own concerto for organ, Hammond organ and orchestra, *Multiversum*,

while Nott closes the season with Mahler's gigantic Third Symphony.  
**osr.ch**

#### Teatro alla Scala, Milan

Many will be eagerly anticipating the world premiere of Salvatore Sciarrino's new opera *Ti vedo, ti sento, mi perdo* which opens at La Scala on November 14. Elsewhere Myung-Whun Chung conducts a new production of *Der Freischütz* and Diego Fasolis is on hand to steer Handel's *Tamerlano* in a new production from David Livermore, while Marc Albrecht conducts a new *Hänsel und Gretel* staged by Sven-Eric Bechtolf.  
**teatroallascala.org/en**

#### Teatro Real, Madrid

A rich season sees the premiere of José Melchor Gomis y Colomer's forgotten *El pintor*, a new production of Britten's *Gloriana* from David McVicar under Ivor Bolton, Madrid's first sight of Richard Jones's *La bohème*, and John Fulljames's new production of Weill's *Street Scene*. There are revivals of Calixto Bieito's *Die Soldaten* (Zimmermann) and Leonard Foglia's *Dead Man Walking* (Heggie).  
**teatro-real.com**

#### Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

The ever-busy Andris Nelsons opens the Vienna Philharmonic's Musikverein season with Beethoven's Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. Later in the season Daniel Barenboim takes charge of Mahler's Seventh Symphony, Gustavo Dudamel leads a performance of Ives's Second Symphony and Zubin Mehta conducts Brahms's First Symphony alongside Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra.  
**wienerphilharmoniker.at**

#### Vienna Staatsoper

New productions for the 2017/18 season include Prokofiev's *The Gambler* directed by Karoline Gruber, Berg's *Lulu* from Willy Decker, Handel's *Ariodante* staged by David McVicar, Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* from Alexandra Liedtke, and Weber's *Der Freischütz* in a staging by Christian Rath. Elsewhere, Adam Fischer conducts a complete *Ring* cycle and James Conlon conducts Verdi's *Falstaff*.  
**wiener-staatsoper.at**



#### 2nd September BBC Proms at ...

Featuring Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King* conducted by Sian Edwards

#### 3rd – 14th November La Tragédie de Carmen

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**wiltons.org.uk**

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## NORTH AMERICA

Louis Langrée conducts the Cincinnati SO in a semi-staged *Pelléas et Mélisande***Baltimore Symphony Orchestra**

Wynton Marsalis opens the Baltimore season at Meyerhoff with a special gala concert. Standout events to follow include principal guest conductor Markus Stenz's exploration of Wagner's *Parsifal* and music director Marin Alsop's two performances of *The Rite of Spring* as well as her late-season homage to her mentor Leonard Bernstein, for which she is joined by Nicola Benedetti in the composer's *Serenade*.

[www.bsomusic.org](http://www.bsomusic.org)

**Boston Symphony Orchestra**

The Shostakovich symphony cycle whose recorded fruits have garnered such positive reviews in *Gramophone* continues this season, with Nelsons and the BSO tackling Symphonies Nos 4, 11 and 14. A Bernstein strand salutes the composer-conductor's anniversary while Jean-Yves Thibaudet is the orchestra's first ever artist-in-residence, playing concertos by composers from Bach to Saint-Saëns and taking the obligato piano part in Bernstein's Symphony No 2, *The Age of Anxiety*.

[bso.org](http://bso.org)

**Canadian Opera Company**

Jane Archibald is artist-in-residence for the season and takes the role of Zdenka in the season opener, Strauss's rarity *Arabella*, in a production by Tim Albery. Archibald plays Konstanze in the mid-season highlight, a new

production of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* from Wajdi Mouawad. Stephen Lawless's new staging of Verdi's *Anna Bolena* closes the season.

[coc.ca](http://coc.ca)

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

To celebrate 60 years since the founding of the Chicago Symphony Chorus, the choir join the CSO and music director Riccardo Muti for performances of Schubert's Mass No 6 and Rossini's *Stabat mater*. Muti also collaborates with string soloists Anne-Sophie Mutter and Yo-Yo Ma, and introduces new music by both the orchestra's composer-in-residence Elizabeth Ogonek and CSO member Max Raimi.

[cso.org](http://cso.org)

**Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra**

Cincinnati's beautiful Music Hall reopens at the start of the season, its most high-profile resident ensemble celebrating with five world premieres plus staples of the symphonic repertoire including Bruckner's Fourth, Mahler's First and Tchaikovsky's Sixth. Music director Louis Langrée also conducts a semi-staged performance of his compatriot Claude Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

[cincinnati-symphony.org](http://cincinnati-symphony.org)

**The Cleveland Orchestra**

The Cleveland Orchestra's 100th season includes staged performances of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Wagner's

*Tristan und Isolde* under music director Franz Welser-Möst, the latter work igniting a two-week festival, The Ecstasy of *Tristan und Isolde*, which explores the 'depths and wonder of ecstasy' in music and film. The Prometheus Project, meanwhile, which spans two weekends, focuses on Beethoven.

[clevelandorchestra.com](http://clevelandorchestra.com)

**Dallas Opera**

The standout work in Dallas Opera's new season is Korngold's rarity *The Ring of Polykrates* (paired with the composer's Violin Concerto played by Augustin Dumay); Emmanuel Villaume conducts a production by Peter Kazaras. Other works include Michel van der Aa's *Sunken Garden*, Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* and evergreens *Don Giovanni* and *La traviata*.

[dallasopera.org](http://dallasopera.org)

**Dallas Symphony Orchestra**

There are milestones aplenty in the DSO's 2017/18 season, including Jaap van Zweden's 10th and final season as music director and the 25th anniversary of the Lay Family Concert Organ at the Meyerson Symphony Center. In addition to solo recitals, the instrument features in orchestral performances of Poulenc's Organ Concerto, Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony* No 3 and Barber's *Toccata Festiva*.

[mydso.com](http://mydso.com)

**Detroit Symphony Orchestra**

Leonard Slatkin's decade as music director comes to an end in a season that opens with Barber's Piano Concerto and closes with a concert performance of Puccini's *Turandot*. A festival of music from France will 'explore the variety of music, song and dance that inhabits the French soul', according to Slatkin, who also conducts seven world premieres from American composers over the course of the season.

[dso.org](http://dso.org)

**Handel and Haydn Society**

Bach's B minor Mass, Christmas cantatas and *Brandenburg Concertos* all feature in the Society's Boston season, with artistic director Harry Christophers conducting

the former. The season opens with Masaki Suzuki's performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony while Christophers returns at the season's end for Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* and Handel's *Hercules*.

[handelandhaydn.org](http://handelandhaydn.org)

**Los Angeles Opera**

Big names dominate the two big shows at LA Opera this season: Plácido Domingo takes the title-role in Verdi's *Nabucco* while Kelsey Grammer of *Frasier* fame joins the cast for a new production of Bernstein's rollicking opera-musical *Candide*. The company collaborates with Joffrey Ballet for a dance-led production of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, and *Carmen* and *The Pearl Fishers* are also on the bill.

[laopera.org](http://laopera.org)

**Los Angeles Philharmonic**

The LA Phil's 99th season includes 'Mozart 1791' (a focus on his last year), plus a celebration of music from Mexico City, a cycle of the Schumann symphonies under Gustavo Dudamel, an exploration of the works of former music director Esa-Pekka Salonen, and the commencement of Susanna Mälkki's tenure as principal guest conductor. Her concert repertoire this season includes Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Strauss's *An Alpine Symphony*.

[laphil.com](http://laphil.com)

**Lyric Opera of Chicago**

Among the new productions in the Chicago company's new season are Gounod's *Faust* in a staging by Kevin Newbury conducted by Emmanuel Villaume, and the same Joffrey Ballet collaboration, Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, as that being performed in Los Angeles. The Chicago *Ring*, directed by David Pountney and conducted by music director Andrew Davis, continues with *Die Walküre*.

[lyricopera.org](http://lyricopera.org)

**Metropolitan Opera, New York**

The Met's season features 26 works including five new productions, two of which are house premieres: Thomas Adès's *The Exterminating Angel* and Massenet's *Cendrillon*. Notable new productions include

Phelim McDermott's *Così fan tutte* 'set on Coney Island in the 1950s', and a new staging of *Tosca* from David McVicar with a gobsmackingly strong cast that includes not just Jonas Kaufmann but Bryn Terfel too. [metopera.org](http://metopera.org)

### Minnesota Orchestra

The single biggest undertaking in the Minnesota Orchestra's new season is a Tchaikovsky Marathon which will include the composer's numbered symphonies and all the concertos, as well as ballet scores and other miscellaneous orchestral works. New music includes Anders Hillborg's Violin Concerto No 2, Sebastian Currier's *RE-FORMATION* and Jeff Beal's Flute Concerto. Conductors Michael Francis, Klaus Mäkelä, John Storgårds and Rafael Payare make their debuts. [minnesotaorchestra.org](http://minnesotaorchestra.org)

### National Arts Centre Orchestra

Highlights of the 2017/18 season include touring across Canada with the multi-media 'Life Reflected' (four works about remarkable women), and the Ideas of North Festival, with music director Alexander Shelley, principal guest conductor John Storgårds and Hannu Lintu, featuring the music of Sibelius, Matthew Whittall, Saariaho and Salonen. The season also includes performances by Izhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Joshua Bell, Karina Canellakis, Branford Marsalis, Xian Zhang and Emanuel Ax. [nac-cna.ca/orchestra](http://nac-cna.ca/orchestra)

### National Symphony Orchestra

Leonard Bernstein looms large but, for those wanting respite from his centenary, there are plenty of diversions, including Brahms and Schumann from Gianandrea Noseda, Christoph Eschenbach and Marek Janowski, and a performance of John Adams's *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* to mark the composer's 70th birthday. [kennedy-center.org](http://kennedy-center.org)

### New York Philharmonic

With Alan Gilbert's tenure over, music director designate Jaap van Zweden takes on the mantle with performances of repertoire staples including Mahler's Fifth Symphony and Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Gilbert guests for Beethoven's Fifth on the

orchestra's 175th birthday while, as artist-in-residence, Leif Ove Andsnes performs piano concertos by Britten, Rachmaninov and Debussy. [nyphil.org](http://nyphil.org)

### Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal

A Beethoven cycle under chief conductor Kent Nagano is the main thread of the orchestra's new season. Also on the bill are performances of Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No 1 by Steven Isserlis, Shostakovich's Violin Concerto No 2 by Alina Ibragimova, Schumann's Violin Concerto by Gidon Kremer, and Brahms's Violin Concerto by Maxim Vengerov. [osm.ca](http://osm.ca)

### Philadelphia Orchestra

The 2017/18 season is billed as having everything from 'Baroque to Broadway', for which Broadway refers to a concert performance of Bernstein's *West Side Story* and Baroque covers a wealth of treats including a Christmas performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts Puccini's *Tosca* in a production with the orchestra on stage at Verizon Hall, while the annual winter festival in January focuses on music from the British Isles. [philorch.org](http://philorch.org)

### Pittsburg Symphony Orchestra

In his 10th season as music director in Pittsburgh, Manfred Honeck conducts Haydn's *The Creation*, Verdi's Requiem and the complete piano concertos of Beethoven with assorted soloists including Emanuel Ax and Benjamin Grosvenor. Composer of the year is Jennifer Higdon, whose music features in no fewer than five concerts, while debut artists include Mark Elder who conducts Elgar's First Symphony. [pittsburghsymphony.org](http://pittsburghsymphony.org)

### St Louis Symphony Orchestra

America's second-oldest orchestra bids farewell to music director David Robertson at the end of his 13th season. Mozart forms the backbone of the 2017/18 programme, which includes a survey of his late symphonies, opera overtures and piano concertos. Robertson himself conducts Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and the suite from Adès's

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David Robertson bids farewell to St Louis SO with music by Beethoven and Adès

**Powder Her Face.** Baroque maestros Laurence Cummings and Matthew Halls make their debuts at Powell Hall. [stlsymphony.org](http://stlsymphony.org)

### San Francisco Opera

Standing colossus-like at the end of San Francisco Opera's season is a complete *Ring* cycle conducted by Donald Runnicles in a production by Francesca Zambello. The season opens with Puccini's *Turandot* directed by Garnett Bruce, while the composer of that work is echoed

later on in a new creation from John Adams and Peter Sellars, *Girls of the Golden West*. A revival of Keith Warner's *Elektra* is also on the bill. [sfopera.com](http://sfopera.com)

### San Francisco Symphony

The Bay Area's orchestra marks the Bernstein centenary with six concerts, including a performance of *Candide* conducted by music director Michael Tilson Thomas. Hot prospects among the orchestra's Cultural Ties series, in which guest

conductors bring music from their homelands, include Krzysztof Urbanski conducting Penderecki and Osmo Vänskä conducting Sibelius. [sfsymphony.org](http://sfsymphony.org)

### Seattle Symphony

New music is playing an increasingly significant role in the Seattle Symphony's programmes and many will be eager to hear John Luther Adams's *Become Desert*, the follow-up to his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Become Ocean*, this season. Music by other living composers including Mason Bates, Steve Reich and Alexander Raskatov also features, while a Berlioz focus from outgoing music director Ludovic Morlot underlines a great 'contemporary' composer of the past. [seattlesymphony.org](http://seattlesymphony.org)

### Tafelmusik

Canada's Baroque orchestra and choir welcome their new music director Elisa Citterio with a special season-opening concert featuring music by Handel, Vivaldi and Rameau. Later on, the players are joined by Kristian Bezuidenhout for Mozart concertos directed from the fortepiano and also united with their

choir for Handel's *Alexander's Feast* under Ivars Taurins, director of the choral programme. [tafelmusik.org](http://tafelmusik.org)

### Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Peter Oundjian's 13th and final season at the helm of the TSO includes a tribute to Canadian legend Glenn Gould, a performance of Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and, as the grand finale, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Elsewhere Andrew Davis conducts Sibelius, Lars Vogt plays Brahms's Piano Concerto No 2, and Gustavo Gimeno presents a rare performance of Ligeti's *Concerto Românesc*. [tso.ca](http://tso.ca)

### Washington National Opera

Washington's season begins with a production of Verdi's *Aida* from Francesca Zambello that promises to be dazzling, and offers talent in the pit in the form of rising conductor Evan Rogister. A new production of Handel's *Alcina* from Anne Bogart follows, while the highlight of the spring season is yet another new production: Verdi's *Don Carlo* staged by Tim Albery and conducted by Philippe Auguin. [kennedy-center.org/wno](http://kennedy-center.org/wno)

## REST OF THE WORLD

### Astana Opera House, Kazakhstan

The company of La Scala visits the Astana Opera House in the capital of Kazakhstan for performances of Verdi's final opera, the comedy *Falstaff*, during the first week in September. The performances are conducted by Zubin Mehta. The company stays in town for performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony immediately thereafter. Details of the rest of the season will be available shortly. [astanaopera.kz](http://astanaopera.kz)

### Hong Kong Philharmonic

Music director Jaap van Zweden takes charge of a concert performance of one of the biggest operas of them all, Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, and also conducts Mahler's Fifth, Bruckner's Eighth, Dvořák's Ninth, Saint-Saëns's *Organ* Symphony and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* over the course of the season. Visiting conductors include Jun Märkl, Vladimir

Ashkenazy, Hans Graf, Charles Dutoit and Christoph Eschenbach. [hkphil.org](http://hkphil.org)

### NHK Symphony Orchestra, Japan

The season kicks off with the NHK Festival which incorporates a concert performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* under chief conductor Paavo Järvi. The Estonian goes on to conduct Shostakovich's and Mahler's Seventh Symphonies, an all-Bartók programme, Fauré's Requiem, works by Toru Takemitsu and excerpts from Wagner's *Ring*. Guest conductors include Christoph Eschenbach, Tugan Sokhiev and Herbert Blomstedt. [www.nhkso.or.jp](http://www.nhkso.or.jp)

### Royal Opera House Muscat, Oman

The Royal Opera House Muscat enters its seventh year and opens the season with a visit from the company of the Teatro Regio in Turin performing Verdi's *Aida*. Among other visiting companies is

the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, which tours Franco Zeffirelli's production of *Pagliacci*. The season includes the house's own co-production of Bellini's *Norma*, in collaboration with Opéra de Rouen. [rohmuscat.org.om](http://rohmuscat.org.om)

### Singapore Symphony Orchestra

Lan Shui celebrates 21 years, and his penultimate season, as music director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra presents the complete Brahms symphonies, Mahler's Sixth and Seventh, and Bruckner's Third and Ninth. There are operatic programmes in the form of a concert performance of Puccini's *La bohème* and Henk de Vliet's 'orchestral adventure' based on Wagner's *Ring*. [sso.org.sg](http://sso.org.sg)

### Suntory Hall, Japan

Suntory Hall opens after a renovation just in time for the new season. As well as the regular

resident orchestras that include the New Japan Philharmonic and Toyko Metropolitan Orchestra, the hall presents its own varied series of organ recitals, chamber music performances, new music focuses and appearances from orchestras on tour, which this season includes a residency from the Boston Symphony Orchestra. [suntory.com](http://suntory.com)

### Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Japan

Myung-Whun Chung opens the orchestra's Suntory Hall season with Mahler's mighty *Resurrection* Symphony. Mikhail Pletnev and Andrea Battistoni follow up with music from Finland and Russia, while Kazumasa Watanabe leads the orchestra at Opera City in a performance of Liszt's Piano Concerto No 1 with Tomoki Sakata, the Japanese winner of the Liszt International Piano Competition. [tpo.or.jp](http://tpo.or.jp)



# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Richard Wigmore finds much to admire in Yannick Nézet-Séguin's complete Mendelssohn symphonies, brilliantly played by the Chamber Orchestra of Europe



### Mendelssohn

Complete Symphonies

Karina Gauvin, Regula Mühlemann *sops*

Daniel Behle *ten* RIAS Chamber Choir; Chamber Orchestra of Europe / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DG ④ 479 7337GH3 (3h 20' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie de Paris, February 2016



*'Brio and Mendelssohnian grace go hand in hand, buoyed by an agile, lissom bass line and violin-playing of thistledown delicacy'*

an essentially Mendelssohnian quality of innocence.

Conductor and orchestra show the same vitality and care for instrumental colour and balancing in the choral sections, from the murmuring idyll of 'Sagt es, die ihr erlöset seid' to the exultancy of 'Die Nacht ist vergangen', euphorically launched by Karina Gauvin. Once over a slightly squally first entry, Gauvin impresses with her full, warm tone and verbal sensitivity, while tenor Daniel Behle matches Litton's Christoph Prégardien in the anxious questioning of 'Ist die Nacht bald hin?' and surpasses him in lyrical allure. My only real caveat is that the impact of the excellent RIAS chorus is rather muted in the resonant acoustic.

Like the *Lobgesang*, the once-derided (including by the composer) *Reformation* is hard to meld into a satisfying structural entity. Nézet-Séguin, persuasively to my ears, prioritises lyricism and grace, without short-changing the first movement's *con fuoco* marking. Here and in the finale his

gift for building tension over long spans ensures that the music never merely happens. Spurred on by athletically sparring *divisi* violins, the first movement drives to a fine, searing climax, while the finale darts and leaps jubilantly, with no whiff of pomposity in the marching second theme that irresistibly evokes 'O my darling Clementine'. Delightful, too, are the airy, chamber-musical textures of the Scherzo and pastoral Trio, and the unsentimental eloquence of the *Andante*, enhanced by tastefully judged sliding portamentos – another hallmark of these performances – and meticulous observation of Mendelssohn's detailed dynamic markings. Like Antonello Manacorda in his recent recording (Sony Classical, 6/17), Nézet-Séguin uses the recently published edition of the symphony by Christopher Hogwood, which, inter alia, restores the woodwind fantasy-cadenza at the start of the finale that Mendelssohn deleted from his autograph. This is one of the most compelling *Reformations* on disc.

The early C minor – here more suave than fiery – and the two favourite named symphonies are almost as good. Brio and Mendelssohnian grace go hand in hand in the outer movements of the *Italian*, buoyed by an agile, lissom bass line and, where apt, violin-playing of thistledown delicacy. The development's gradual surge from tense *pianissimo* lull to the jubilant return of the main theme is one of many moments in these symphonies that proclaims Nézet-Séguin's mastery of transition. For my taste the processional second movement, shaped *con amore*, is too measured for an *Andante con moto*: Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players (Erato, 11/90) are spot-on here. But for a combination of poise, élan and light, pointed rhythmic



Imaginative and fabulously executed - Yannick Nézet-Séguin's live Mendelssohn symphonies are among the finest available

articulation (so crucial in Mendelssohn), the final saltarello has rarely been bettered.

True to form, Nézet-Séguin emphasises elegiac lyricism in the flexibly paced opening movement of the *Scottish* (the *Allegro*'s main theme is hardly *un poco agitato*), though he gives full value to the contrapuntal tensions of the development, underpinned by exemplary timpani clarity. The superb (unnamed) COE clarinet – a star player in this symphony – launches one of the most ebullient and brilliantly played Scherzos on disc. While the *Adagio* is rather broader than Mendelssohn's swift metronome marking, the main theme combines luminous purity with expressive, natural-sounding rubato, while Nézet-Séguin's perfectly graded crescendos enhance the hieratic starkness

of the minor-key episodes. The finale is marvellously atmospheric, from the trenchancy of the opening (mindful of Mendelssohn's original *guerriero* marking), through the mysterious sense of distancing in the hushed clarinet-bassoon duo before the coda, to a bounding, exultant peroration. It's dangerous, of course, to nominate an outright winner, especially given the competition in the *Scottish* and *Italian* symphonies. A pity, too, about the slightly fuzzy recording of the chorus in the *Lobgesang*. But for anyone wanting a complete set of the symphonies in the lean, lithe modern mould – my kind of Mendelssohn – Nézet-Séguin's imaginative, fabulously executed performances guarantee abiding pleasure. **G**

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## Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



# Orchestral



## Andrew Farach-Colton listens to distinctive Ives from Seattle:

*'Morlot takes the Americana out of Ives in much the same way that Boulez wished to "burn the mist" from Debussy'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 53**



## Richard Bratby enjoys a disc of 21st-century violin concertos:

*'Mackenzie isn't afraid of a bit of rosin and horsehair; and in slower music she sustains a sweet and fluid tone'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**

## H Andriessen

'Symphonic Works, Vol 4'

Symphony No 4. Canzone. Capriccio.

Libertas venit: Rhapsody

Netherlands Symphony Orchestra /

David Porcelijn

CPO © CPO777 845-2 (56' • DDD)



The continuation of CPO's Hendrik Andriessen series shows the Dutchman

to be nothing if not consistent. His music is always full of ideas and energy, never outstaying its welcome. There is a minimum of padding or extraneous rhetoric, and comparisons with the likes of Roussel, Hartmann and Hindemith spring readily to mind. The fibrousness of Andriessen's invention makes it feel somehow good for the digestion. Yet at the same time it is never quite savoury enough to delight the palate or substantial enough to nourish the soul. Apostle of order that he is, Andriessen lacks the top-flight symphonist's imperative to take risks and to ensure that the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

The Fourth Symphony of 1954 is couched in his characteristically wiry, neo-baroque vein, the severity in this case deriving not least from a 12-note melody deployed in various guises across the work. There is certainly a good deal of drive and communicative energy to the outer movements, trenchantly delivered as they are here by the well-recorded Netherlands Symphony Orchestra under David Porcelijn. For me, however, much of the central *Andante sostenuto* feels just on the wrong side of the divide between the intriguingly chewy and the unappetisingly gristly.

From the same year as the symphony, *Libertas venit* is a militant, angry piece – not surprisingly, since it commemorates the harshness of Nazi German occupation. Billed as a Rhapsody, its 16 minutes could almost qualify as one of Andriessen's compressed symphonies. The Capriccio was actually composed during the

occupation and is more gutsy and sinewy than the title would suggest. Like so much of Andriessen it only disappoints by ending before its natural energies are spent. Finally, the Canzone of 1971 is mainly festive and upbeat, with an all-too-brief moment of reflection at its heart.

David Fanning

## Bliss • Walton

Bliss Violin Concerto

Walton Violin Concerto (original 1939 version)

Lorraine McAslan *vn*

BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7342 (72' • DDD/DSD)



Keen-eared collectors will enjoy spotting the differences between Walton's original

1939 version of the Violin Concerto (familiar to connoisseurs from dedicatee Jascha Heifetz's dazzling premiere recording for HMV from February 1941 with Eugene Goossens and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra) and the rather more leanly scored revision (dated November 20, 1943). Dutton's multichannel hybrid SACD leads off with the first modern recording of the former. Very satisfying it is, too: Lorraine McAslan gives an impressively secure and stylish account of the (unchanged) solo part, and she enjoys alert and spirited support from Martin Yates and the BBC Concert Orchestra, whose percussionists are kept on their toes in the central Neapolitan Scherzo especially (listen out for some delightfully piquant contributions from castanets and xylophone).

The Walton shares this disc with the substantial concerto that Arthur Bliss tailored for the Italian-born British virtuoso Alfredo Campoli (and his generously songful timbre and superlative spiccato in particular). Full of first-rate ideas and immaculately crafted, it is a work of vaulting ambition, strong personality and considerable imaginative scope that

ill deserves its comparative neglect.

Indeed, this would seem to be only the concerto's third commercial recording, following Campoli's own pioneering version from November 1955 with the LPO under the composer (once available on Beulah in a really excellent transfer by Decca's Tony Hawkins – 9/95, nla) and Lydia Mordkovich's trusty alliance with Richard Hickox and the BBC NOW (Chandos, 11/06). Suffice to report, McAslan and Yates do Bliss's abundantly communicative inspiration absolutely proud in a judiciously prepared reading of the uncut score that ideally combines purposeful thrust, big-hearted conviction and combustible spontaneity.

The expansive acoustic of Watford Colosseum (formerly Town Hall) lends a kindly glow to proceedings, and there are useful notes by Stephen Lloyd. Plaudits to everyone involved with this most rewarding issue. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Brahms

Complete Symphonies

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

BSO Classics © 3 1701/3 (169' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, November 2016



In a personal booklet note for this set Andris Nelsons celebrates the recorded legacy of

Brahms in Boston, referencing complete cycles from Leinsdorf and Haitink and recordings of individual symphonies under Koussevitzky, Munch and Ozawa. Only a conductor supremely confident in his own identity would venture to do so, of course, and Nelsons is nothing if not his own man in this repertoire, confounding expectations in some respects while confirming them in others. His Brahms is as vital, impulsive and rhythmic as all his work strives to be – though not as sheerly dynamic as one might have imagined – but there is blend and bloom, too, with Symphony Hall,



Blend and bloom: Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra offer impulsive and rhythmic Brahms symphonies

Boston, seeming to accommodate this music from the bass lines upwards; a deep and sonorous sound.

Nelsons talks of finding precisely the right character for each movement and in that he truly listens to the music, feeling its pulse and allowing the phrasing to evolve with as little intervention or 'shaping' as possible. He is generous without indulgence, muscular without vulgarity. Just occasionally one senses him harnessing his natural dynamism in deference to the music's noble pedigree. Perhaps I was expecting a higher degree of tension and excitement from the opening movement of the First Symphony. The promise is there in the tragically underpinned *sostenuto* of the opening – giving way as it does to the enticing woodwinds of the second lyric idea – but maybe the main *Allegro* could be a shade more imperative.

That's the thing about this music: you don't want to unduly drive it but nor do you want to simply luxuriate in it. The second movement of the First brings to the fore the distinguished Boston woodwinds and a sense of the music evolving in the playing of it. And then there is the finale, with storm clouds famously clearing with the BSO's refulgent solo horn and a chorale of trombones to die for. Now

the main *Allegro* here is liberating for sure, and perhaps Nelsons had been intentionally holding something in reserve because the climax leading to the return of the ubiquitous horn theme is rollicking indeed.

Anyone who thinks that Brahms was the conservative and Wagner the radical needs to think again. The evolution of the Second demonstrates how mindful Nelsons is of that. The myriad twists and turns and underlying threat of the autumnal first movement (where the deviation from and contortion of form is so pronounced) is boldly chronicled, and the second movement – with wonderful string-playing – is likewise gripping in the way Nelsons appreciates how daringly the material is developed. But the sun comes out again in the bracing finale and Nelsons is definitely off the leash. The return of the second subject is the warmest of hugs and the coda is exuberantly rip-roaring, descending trombones cutting through the texture like noisy bell chimes.

The Third Symphony is gorgeous. The first movement has what the Viennese might call *Schwung* (Nelsons includes the exposition repeat) and the development really earns its climax. In the slow movement the aforementioned naturalness and fluidity of Nelsons's phrasing (what musicality this

man has) is possessed of a spontaneity that repays his belief in the music. The Bostonians really sing. And the celebrated *Poco allegretto* of the third movement has the appropriate ache of nostalgia. Note, too, the magical evaporation of the finale's coda: Nelsons's Wagner tellingly referenced.

And so to the great Fourth. Again, don't expect Toscanini. Nelsons builds the first movement's head of steam by stealth, measuring its expansive lyricism – and grandeur – with a growing resolve. The measured processional of the second movement evolves into something quite ravishing, with the return of that second theme in the chest register of the Boston strings especially memorable. A similar voluptuousness arrives with the first variant of the chaconne finale and you can almost feel Nelsons channelling Brahms in the way he moves from one inspired improvisation to the next.

So, much to enjoy from an orchestra who seem to have found the perfect soulmate for this stage in their ongoing journey. The mutual respect and like-mindedness is palpable in each of these performances and, whatever you may feel about this choice or that, there's always a very real sense of music-making happening 'in the moment' and for that one time only. **Edward Seckerson**



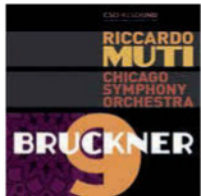
## Bruckner

Symphony No 9 (1894 original version)

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Riccardo Muti

CSO Resound © CSOR901 1716 (62' • DDD)

Recorded live at Orchestra Hall, Symphony Center, Chicago, June 2016



The Chicago Symphony Orchestra has a long tradition of performing Bruckner's

music, the Fourth Symphony having featured in concert as early as 1897 under the orchestra's founder, Theodore Thomas, with performances across the decades under the likes of Stock, Kubelík and Reiner, as well as complete recorded cycles with Barenboim and Solti. By contrast, Riccardo Muti, the orchestra's current music director, does not have an extensive track record with Bruckner's music, his recordings of the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies for Warner both dating back to the 1980s. More recently, however, Muti has included Bruckner in his programming in Chicago, and this recording of the Ninth Symphony derives from concerts in June 2016.

While it's not unknown for conductors to develop an affinity with Bruckner's music with age (one thinks of Bruno Walter in particular), I don't feel Muti's new recording offers any special insight in this music given the extent of the available competition. This is not to say that there aren't many good things here. Muti navigates the symphony with care and patience, achieving a real sense of focus in the *Adagio*, and the playing is trenchant without being over-forceful. The woodwinds in particular make a strong impression. However, one does not find the supernal transparency offered by Dohnányi and the Philharmonia, the expressive charge of Barenboim and the Berlin Philharmonic or the profundity of Giulini's interpretation with the Vienna Philharmonic, to name just three alternative options. The close-focus recording is vivid but slightly lacking in atmosphere and the concluding applause has been edited out. **Christian Hoskins**

*Selected comparisons:*

VPO, Giulini (8/89) (DG) 427 345-2GH

BPO, Barenboim (10/91) (WARN) 2564 61891-2

Philb Orch, Dohnányi (A/15) (SIGN) SIGCD431

## Carter

'Late Works'

Dialogues<sup>a</sup>. Dialogues II<sup>a</sup>. Epigrams<sup>b</sup>. Instances<sup>c</sup>. Interventions<sup>d</sup>. Soundings<sup>d</sup>. Two Controversies and a Conversation<sup>e</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Isabelle Faust *vn* <sup>b</sup>Jean-Guihen Queyras *vc*

<sup>abde</sup>Pierre-Laurent Aimard *pf* <sup>e</sup>Colin Currie *perc*

<sup>ae</sup>Birmingham Contemporary Music Group;

<sup>cd</sup>BBC Symphony Orchestra / Oliver Knussen

Online © ODE1296-2 (75' • DDD)



The late works of Elliott Carter (1908-2012) are so numerous as to

constitute an output on their own. Just where the composer's 'late period' begins is itself a matter of conjecture, yet no one hearing the pieces on this disc is likely to doubt their technical finesse or expressive refinement: qualities that go a long way towards the defining of 'lateness' in artistic terms.

Not that finesse or refinement equates to lack of ambition – witness the relatively expansive design of *Interventions* (2007), where piano and orchestra undercut each other in unexpected ways such that the outcome is a free-flowing fantasia as varied in content as it is cumulative in impact. *Dialogues* (2003) is more evidently a series of deftly interrelated vignettes, piano eliding between various soloists and ensembles with a poise that recalls the character sketches in Carter's string quartets; a procedure fined-down in the brief though vital 'introduction and allegro' of *Dialogues II* (2010). *Soundings* (2005) is different again, an ingenious solution to the problem of the pianist also being a conductor; here the soloist's laconic gestures bookend a central section containing some of the most explosive music from Carter's last two decades.

Nor is humour at a premium. *Two Controversies and a Conversation* (2011) finds the piano at first mediating between ensemble and percussion, Colin Currie switching deftly between marimba and woodblocks, before a more balanced and equitable discourse ensues. Carter's earliest mentor, Charles Ives, would have been as impressed by this as by the interplay of dynamism and stasis in *Instances* (2012), whose ending yields an exquisite uneventfulness. *Epigrams* (2012) consists of 12 refractory miniatures, their salient gestures constantly recurring so that diversity is not at the expense of unity – however hard-won. Isabelle Faust and Jean-Guihen Queyras join purposefully with Pierre-Laurent Aimard for this teasingly gnomic swansong.

Aimard's credentials in Carter were established with a highly impressive account of *Night Fantasies* (Warner Classics, 9/05) and he tackles this always demanding

pianism with alacrity and perception. He brings a more varied timbre to *Dialogues* than the excellent Nicolas Hodges and enjoys better coordination than the New Music Concerts Ensemble. Daniel Barenboim's premiere of *Dialogues II* is audibly a 'first night' affair, with that of *Instances* by the Seattle SO just a little rough-edged. But then, the playing of both BCMG and the BBC SO benefits greatly from the guidance of Oliver Knussen, whose accounts of the *Concerto for Orchestra* (Virgin/Erato, 7/92) and *Symphonia* (DG, 1/00) are staples of the Carter discography. Finely recorded, with authoritative notes by John Link, this new disc is sure to occupy no less significant a place. There are unlikely to be any better discs of contemporary music this year.

**Richard Whitehouse**

*Dialogues – selected comparisons:*

Hodges, London Sinfonietta, Knussen

(4/06) (BRID) BRIDGE9184

New Music Concerts Ens, Aitkin (2/09) (NAXO) 8 559614

*Dialogues II – comparative version:*

Barenboim, Staatskapelle Berlin, Mehta

(DG) DVD 073 4990GH

*Instances – comparative version:*

Seattle SO, Morlot (11/14) (SSM) SSM1003

► Read about Elliott Carter's late works on page 18

## Chaminade

Callirhoë, Op 37. Concertstück, Op 40<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Victor Sangiorgio *pf*

BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7339 (78' • DDD/DSD)



*Callirhoë* is no mere ballet score but a 'ballet symphonique', a title perhaps inspired

by Litolf's earlier five *concertos symphoniques*. First produced in 1888, it was said to have received over 200 performances. There is a four-movement orchestral suite (Prélude, Pas des Écharpes, Scherzettino and Pas des Cymbales) but since its premiere it seems that the complete score has not been heard until this recording. The piano score of 1889 reveals a few short extra (and non-essential) passages not heard here, though whether added to the original score by the composer or cut by the conductor I am not sure: the music has been 'researched and edited ... from various original scores' by the indefatigable Martin Yates.

It strikes me that, had *Callirhoë* had the imprimatur of a composer with a higher profile and larger corpus of regularly performed *oeuvres* (Tchaikovsky, say, or Dvořák), Chaminade's score would surely have found its way on to disc decades ago and – who knows? – be a regular feature of

international ballet. The music is certainly accomplished and appealing enough – think Moszkowski and Tchaikovsky with a dash of Edward German – even if the love story of the captive princess Callirhoë and Alcmæon (too prolix to relate here but dutifully recounted in Lewis Foreman's informative booklet) may stretch the audience's willing suspension of disbelief to its limits. Of the 22 brief dances, some will recognise the above-mentioned Scarf Dance, a once-popular piano solo (Godowsky, for one, recorded it in 1926).

The *Concertstück* featured on another recording only a few months ago on Hyperion (Danny Driver with the BBC Scottish SO and Rebecca Miller – 3/17). To be frank, there is little to choose between them, Driver with marginally the crisper, lighter touch, Yates and Victor Sangiorgio recorded with slightly more resonance and depth. Both are admirable champions of this unjustly neglected crowd-pleaser but it is the rarity of *Callirhoë* and the quite superb advocacy of the BBC Concert Orchestra – few other bands play this kind of music quite as well – that are the real selling points of this notable release. **Jeremy Nicholas**

*Concertstück* – comparative version:

Driver, BBC Scottish SO, Miller

(3/17) (HYPE) CDA68130

## Dvořák · Sibelius

**Dvořák** Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178 **Sibelius** Finlandia, Op 26

**Chineke! Orchestra / Kevin John Edusei**

Signum © SIGCD515 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, September 4, 2016



Chineke!'s motto is 'Championing change and celebrating diversity in classical

music'. Its orchestra, made up of young Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) musicians from across Europe, is the brainchild of the indefatigable Chi-chi Nwanoku, usually spotted powering the double bass section of the OAE. It's a terrific initiative and the foundation hopes to run a full season of performances in time.

It can be no accident that the main work on this debut disc is Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, *From the New World*, Fin Conway's booklet note making much of the composer's supposed use of Native American and African American melodies. As director of the National Conservatory in New York, Dvořák wrote: 'I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies ... they are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them.' However, Dvořák never claimed that he employed any traditional melodies in his Ninth, but that 'I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of the Indian music'. He considered the Scherzo could depict the feast scene in Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, which he considered setting to music at one point. There are glorious wide-open spaces in Dvořák's music but whether these are directly inspired by America or by pining for his Bohemian homeland is a moot point.

After ponderous opening cello phrases, Kevin John Edusei conducts a fresh, lively account, full of sunshine. Ensemble is impressive, given the orchestral players have little experience playing as a unit. In the *Largo*, the brass don't have the glowering darkness older orchestras provide but Titus Underwood's cor anglais solo unfolds with natural tenderness and poise. Edusei keeps the Scherzo bubbling along nicely before a speedy, exuberant finale. This isn't a performance to hold up against a Kubelík or an Ančerl

favourite recording but that would be to miss the point. This is a bold statement of intent from an exciting ensemble. It would be great to hear Chineke! champion composers such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

The performance was recorded at the Royal Festival Hall, though any hint of enthusiastic between-movement applause (I read there was lots) has been excised. The disc is short measure but opens with a rousing *Finlandia* to set a celebratory mood. **Mark Pullinger**

## Escaich

Clarinet Concerto<sup>®</sup>. Baroque Song.

Claude – Symphonic Suite. Erinnerung

<sup>®</sup>Paul Meyer cl

**Lyon National Opera Orchestra / Alexandre Bloch**


Sony Classical © 88985 43019-2 (73' • DDD)




*Baroque Song* (2007) draws on chorale preludes for organ by Bach – Thierry

Escaich is organist at the Church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris and knows that repertoire intimately – while *Erinnerung* (2009) takes inspiration from Beethoven. In the booklet note, Escaich writes about 'preserving this indissoluble thread that links us to the past'. What's most impressive is how this thread, while often clearly evident, is woven so finely into a fabric that is unmistakably the composer's own.

*Baroque Song*, for example, begins with a fast-running, rhythmically regular Bach quotation that's gradually overrun and subsumed. At times Escaich relies a bit too easily on stock-in-trade modernist devices: disruptive snarls of brass and dense, dissonant clouds of strings. More often than not, however, the music leads to unexpected territory. The work's long central section also begins with Bach but



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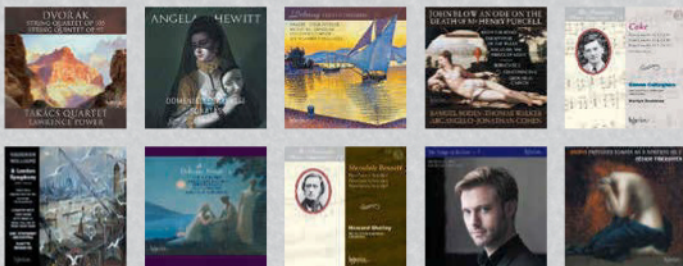
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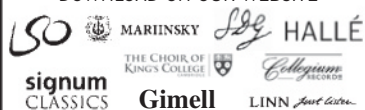
ALINA IBRAGIMOVA violin  
CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEEN piano



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moves slowly and inexorably to a powerful climax that evokes something broodingly passionate and elemental, rather like Sibelius's *Tapiola*. The references to the *Waldstein* Sonata in *Erinnerung* (2007) for string orchestra (reworked from an earlier string quartet) are more like faint shadows than outright quotations; in fact, in its textural complexity and mysterious mood, it's closer in spirit to Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* than to Beethoven.

Escaich's orchestration has a pronounced French accent, though in its delicacy and fine detail his writing owes more to Debussy and Ravel than to, say, Messiaen (another organist-composer). The marvellous Clarinet Concerto (2012) beams myriad rainbows of luminous colour, while the solo part cleverly takes intricate, étude-like figures and manipulates them into long, lyrical melodic arcs. Paul Meyer plays it brilliantly, negotiating the high-lying passages with breathtaking ease, and I like the hint of plangent reediness in his tone.

At its best, Escaich's work conveys a compelling narrative logic. The Clarinet Concerto draws one along from the first note to the last – although the ending feels slightly abrupt. Escaich's flair for the dramatic is most striking in the Symphonic Suite from his opera *Claude* (2014). It obviously loses something of the original score's epic sweep but still gives an emotional wallop. Alexandre Bloch deserves credit for eliciting playing of fierce commitment and élan from the Lyon Opera Orchestra. Strongly recommended.

Andrew Farach-Colton

## Frances-Hoad

'Stolen Rhythm'

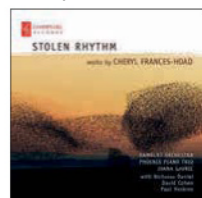
Katharsis<sup>a</sup>. Quark Dances<sup>b</sup>. A Refusal to Mourn<sup>c</sup>. The Forgiveness Machine<sup>d</sup>. Homages<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Nicholas Daniel *ob* <sup>a</sup>David Cohen *vc*

<sup>e</sup>Ivana Gavrić *pf* <sup>d</sup>Phoenix Piano Trio;

<sup>abc</sup>Rambert Orchestra / Paul Hoskins

Champs Hill © CHRC119 (79) • DDD



The largest work on this third Champs Hill release devoted entirely to Cheryl

Frances-Hoad's music is *Katharsis* (2013), written for David Cohen – the nimble soloist here – and styled 'concerto for cello and ensemble', the ensemble being wind quintet and strings, the cello one of Frances-Hoad's own instruments. Its six modest movements, several based on Baroque dance forms (Minuet, Sarabande

and Gavotte reflecting the influence of Bach's and Britten's cello suites) play continuously but for one break midway. The set of seven *Homages* features Frances-Hoad's other main instrument, the piano. Mostly written in 2013-15, two of them – including the title-track 'Stolen Rhythm' (commemorating the bicentenary of Haydn's death) – date from 2009. These enchanting miniature fantasias (Grieg, Janáček, Schubert, Ravel, Mendelssohn and Bartók in Balkan mode are the other composers honoured) are beautifully played by Ivana Gavrić and, as with *Katharsis*, showcase Frances-Hoad's range and appeal as a creator.

My personal favourite of the programme, however, is the centrepiece, *Quark Dances* (2013, inspired by a visit to the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Switzerland), which doubles as the finale to the ballet *The Strange Charm of Mother Nature*. Its quirky vivacity stands in marked contrast to the transcendental piano trio *The Forgiveness Machine* (2011, a meditation on the slow movement of the *Archduke* Trio) or the concluding work, *A Refusal to Mourn* for oboe and strings, the earliest music here, a fantasy on Lutheran chorales written in 2000 but revised 15 years later. Exquisite performances throughout, and quite superb sound. Strongly recommended 21st-century music that should frighten no one but make them pause frequently for thought (not least through her beguilingly idiosyncratic titles). **Guy Rickards**

## Gubaidulina · Shostakovich

Gubaidulina *In tempus praesens*<sup>a</sup>

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1, Op 77<sup>b</sup>

Simone Lamsma *vn* Netherlands Radio

Philharmonic Orchestra / <sup>b</sup>James Gaffigan,

<sup>a</sup>Reinbert de Leeuw

Challenge Classics ©  CC72681 (73) • DDD/DSD

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, October 22, 2011



This is a unique coupling from a young Dutch violinist who entered the lists in

2005 with a fervent all-Elgar recital disc on Naxos and has since been making waves in the 20th-century concerto repertoire. The first Shostakovich and the Britten are special favourites but she has chosen a risky pairing here: two works which could scarcely be more closely associated with their original exponents.

The Gubaidulina turns out to be a live relay from Amsterdam's Concertgebouw,

which means that its wispiest writing must be closely observed by the microphones. While the soloist is kept busy across its entire range, the orchestra (shorn of violins) functions chiefly at the extremes. Reinbert de Leeuw's best efforts notwithstanding, the speculative, rhetorical character of the invention – lament versus affirmation – risks collapsing in on itself even before the concluding burst of applause torpedoes its would-be transcendent ending. The Shostakovich, an established masterpiece whose dash to the finishing line might seem to invite acclamation, is met by silence – this is a studio production. James Gaffigan secures disciplined, slightly stolid playing which may seem a little distanced to those listening through two speakers.

Lamsma acquires herself with distinction without making us forget either David Oistrakh or Anne-Sophie Mutter. A fairer comparison in the Shostakovich might be a contemporary such as Lisa Batiashvili; her muted, weightless deliberation in the opening Nocturne is more successful in projecting the darkness of the piece. If Lamsma's extrovert engagement in the grief-stricken Passacaglia short-circuits some of its power, her finale provides a scintillating denouement. You may well respond more positively than I did to her gleaming tone and rapid vibrato.

**David Gutman**

Shostakovich – selected comparisons:

Oistrakh, New York PO, Mitropoulos

(7/56<sup>8</sup>, 2/07) (SONY) MHK63327 or 88697 00812-2

Batiashvili, Bavarian RSO, Salonen

(3/11) (DG) 477 9299GH

Gubaidulina – selected comparison:

Mutter, LSO, Gergiev (10/08) (DG) 477 7450GH

## Ives

New England Holidays. Orchestral Sets –

No 1, 'Three Places in New England'; No 2

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot

Seattle Symphony Media © SSM1015 (78) • DDD

Partly recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle,

February 2016 – February 2017



'Unidiomatic', I wrote in my notes on first hearing Ludovic

Morlot's interpretation of *Three Places in New England* (the opening work on this disc), then added: 'Least idiomatic Ives ever?!' But as I listened, Morlot's radical approach began making sense. The stiffly meticulous, pianola-like playing of the ragtime fragments in the second movement of the Orchestral Set No 2 have a satisfying Stravinskian bite,



and the astonishing absence of nostalgia in that Set's third movement – with its extensive quotation of the hymn 'In the sweet by and by' – miraculously manages to avoid any hint of sentimentality. Not that the performances are at all cold or expressively stunted; they're quite eloquent, actually.

What Morlot seems to be doing here – and I have no evidence for this beyond what my ears tell me – is to take the Americana out of Ives's music in much the same way that Boulez wished to 'burn the mist' from Debussy's. Not every Ivesian will warm to this approach, of course, and it's not without its flaws. There's precious little humour in these performances, for instance, and that's not a minor cavil. The playful barn dances in the *Allegro* section of 'Washington's Birthday' from the *Holidays* Symphony (listen at 5'55"), are treated abstractly, as if Ives had used fiddle tunes the way Schoenberg used tone rows. The effect is sonically fantastic, particularly once the Jew's harp enters and all hell breaks loose, but it's all very serious.

In a work like 'Decoration Day', however, Morlot's seriousness – his obvious conviction that every note matters – illuminates the visionary in Ives's music. The main section of the movement is ravishingly played by the Seattle Symphony, and when the raucous march intrudes near the end, it doesn't scream or swagger; it swells and soars. A sublime moment – one of many on this provocative disc.

Andrew Farach-Colton

## Mahler

Symphony No 5

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik © 900150 (74' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich, March 2016



'Mahler said his time would come – the question now, for me, is when it will go.' There are so many recordings of the present work that even the most ardent Mahlerian may have a sneaking sympathy with that recent outburst from the venerable *Spectator* critic Michael Tanner. Mariss Jansons himself has regularly toured with the Fifth and it is only a decade since he last allowed his interpretation to be immortalised in Amsterdam.

While there has been no dramatic change in approach since that RCO Live release, fringe factors favour the newcomer. For some listeners the Concertgebouw reading will have been compromised by woozy sound, concluding applause and idiosyncratic packaging. In which case only the clapping is a problem here. The Bavarian ensemble, every bit as fine as its Dutch rival, is on world-beating form, but there remains a potential difficulty. The rich, well-integrated, string-cushioned sounds elicited by Jansons may not be quite what our tormented proto-modernist composer had in mind. At the start Mahler's funeral rites are viewed from a comfortable emotional distance, anguish carefully regulated. Still, the first Trio is disruptive, unexpectedly personal in inflection and pacing. The tempo for the second movement, like that outburst in the first, may be held back a little but not even the spacious Scherzo, which Hermann Scherchen for one was wont to cut, outstays its welcome when the playing is this good. The horns (five in this movement) cover themselves in glory.

One element that feels a tad swifter than before is the *Adagietto*, which should please proponents of the breezy, songful line in this music. Not that Jansons goes for anything too radical: his pastel nine-ish minutes come close to what we know of Mahler's own preference on the podium. Among recent contenders, Osmo Vänskä in Minneapolis subscribes to the alternative authenticity implied by Mahler's written injunction, *Sehr langsam*. He also seems determined to undercut the finale's latent bumptiousness, whereas Jansons offers a more conventional kind of security and finesse. Neither achieves nor perhaps aspires to Leonard Bernstein's euphoria when the second movement's chorale returns to secure what is, for once, an explicitly optimistic end. Jansons's less insistent manner will nonetheless delight his fans and admirers of the orchestra he has made arguably Germany's finest.

David Gutman

Selected comparisons:

VPO, Bernstein (8/88<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 477 6334GGP

RCO, Jansons (12/08) (RCO) RCO08007

Minnesota Orch, Vänskä (8/17) (BIS) BIS2226

## Martinů · Shostakovich

Martinů Cello Concerto No 2, H304

Shostakovich Cello Concerto No 2, Op 126

Christian Poltéra vc

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /

Gilbert Varga

BIS © BIS2257 (64' • DDD/DSD)



Martinů completed his Second Cello Concerto in January 1945, shortly before

commencing work on the Fourth Symphony. In comparison with the First Cello Concerto, the Second is a rather neglected work, not helped by Martinů's failure to secure a performance during his lifetime. It is nevertheless a highly attractive piece, luminously scored and imbued with lyricism and an air of nostalgia. Christian Poltéra's performance is appreciably faster in all three movements than the recordings by Angelica May and Raphael Wallfisch, but his approach very much suits the music's rhapsodic nature while still ensuring the score's darker and more pensive passages make their effect. The heartfelt close of the first movement is a particular highlight, and the extrovert melodies of the *Allegro* finale are projected with virtuosity and excitement. The playing of the orchestra under Varga has all the character and refinement of the Czech Philharmonic under Neumann for May and is much more clearly recorded.

Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto has enjoyed a far greater number of recordings than the Martinů, although few have managed to challenge the riveting intensity of those by the dedicatee, Rostropovich. This new version comes remarkably close. From the brooding introduction through to the enigmatic percussion-accompanied conclusion, Poltéra plays with an impressive focus and concentration, investing Shostakovich's searching, melancholic writing with a conviction that I find enormously compelling. The performance of the cello's faster passages is similarly memorable, notably in the sardonic central *Allegretto* with its use of the Ukrainian street vendor's song 'Come buy my bubliky'. With its scything strings, rasping bassoons and superbly intense horn interjections, the orchestra's vivid accompaniment contributes immensely to the success of the performance and, as with the Martinů, the recording quality is excellent. Strongly recommended. **Christian Hoskins**

Martinů – selected comparisons:

Wallfisch, Czech PO, Běloblávek

(4/92<sup>8</sup>, 12/09) (CHAN) CHAN10547

May, Czech PO, Neumann (2/02) (SUPR) SU3543-2

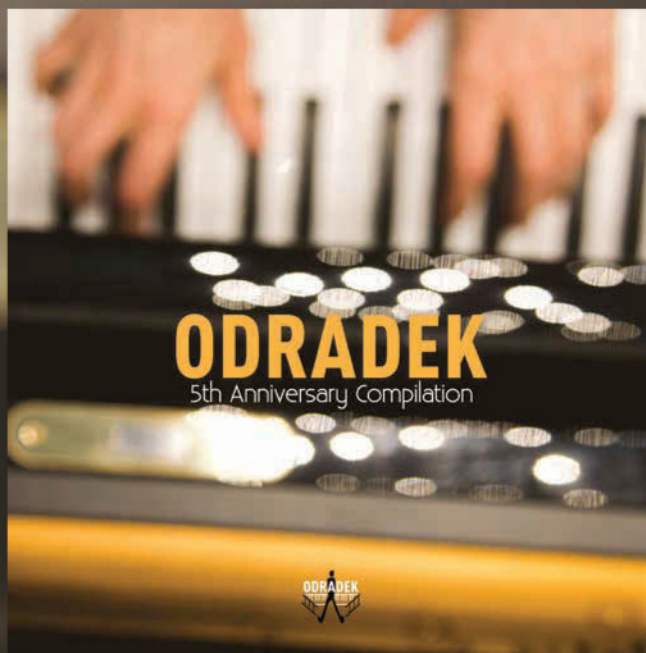
Shostakovich – selected comparison:

Rostropovich, Boston SO, Ozawa

(11/76<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 477 6579 or 479 2561

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## Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 25, K503;  
No 26, 'Coronation', K537

Francesco Piemontesi *pf*

Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Andrew Manze  
Linn (C) CKD544 (61' • DDD)



No fevered D minor  
*Sturm und Drang* or  
sentimental *Elvira*  
*Madigan* for Francesco

Piemontesi's debut Linn (and Mozart concerto) recording. Instead he's chosen a coupling that's a touch more rarefied: the trumpet-and-drum-laden K503 and its successor, the oft-denigrated *Coronation*. This is a young pianist (b1983) who has already amply displayed his Mozartian credentials – on a disc of sonatas and shorter solo works (Naïve, 7/14) and on 'Mozart 225', the 200-CD complete Mozart edition from Decca (10/16), for which he was charged with new recordings of some rarities and discoveries. Here again, his sympathy with the style and ethos of the Salzburger's music simply sings from the speakers.

There is intimacy rather than inwardness to these chamber-scale performances; Piemontesi knows he's the star but is sensitive enough to realise that he shares a firmament with the orchestral soloists, despite being ever so slightly spotlighted in the miking. The militaristic opening movement of K503 can become something of a bang-fest but the Swiss pianist instinctively draws back before overpowering the music, adding cheeky touches of ornamentation here and there as if it were all too easy for him.

He places the somewhat neglected *Coronation* first on the disc and communicates urgently that this is far from the 'poor relation' among Mozart's late piano concertos that it is often puzzlingly assumed to be. It's one of Mozart's most melodically generous and harmonically exploratory concertos (even by his standards), and Piemontesi clearly enjoys the flashes of Bachian imitative writing between the hands. It's a favourite, too, of Maria João Pires, whose live 1990 VPO performance with Abbado is a characteristic miracle of understatement; Piemontesi doesn't feel the need to be so self-effacing, and why should he? This is still young man's music – the composer was a similar age to Piemontesi when he wrote it – and more Mozart from these quarters is eagerly awaited. **David Threasher**

'Coronation' Concerto – selected comparison:

Pires, VPO, Abbado (3/94<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 437 529-2GH,  
479 1435 or 479 4370



## Mussorgsky · Prokofiev

Mussorgsky *Night on the Bare Mountain*.  
Songs and Dances of Death (orch Denisov)<sup>a</sup>

Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Agunda Kulaeva *mez*<sup>a</sup> Vladislav Sulimsky *bass-bar*

<sup>b</sup>Czech Philharmonic Choir, Brno; Gürzenich

Orchestra, Cologne / Dmitry Kitaenko

Oehms (C) OC459 (75' • DDD)



The variably  
transliterated Dmitry  
Kitaenko continues his  
Indian summer with

this non-standard programme of three distinctly malleable masterpieces. Only the Prokofiev is performed in its most familiar guise. We begin with Mussorgsky's *Night on the Bare Mountain* presented un-Rimsky-ised and in purely instrumental form; this is not Mussorgsky's operatic adaptation for *The Fair at Sorochints'i* which one might have expected in this context.

The *Songs and Dances of Death* up next are most frequently heard in the orchestrations by Shostakovich but plentiful alternatives exist from the 1980s. While Kalevi Aho tailored a version for Martti Talvela, this one by Edison Denisov plays to the strengths of Evgeny Nesterenko. A truly sepulchral bass, his elusive Melodiya recording under Gennady Rozhdestvensky combines unrivalled depth of tone and character with inconsistent Soviet sound engineering. Kitaenko has Mariinsky regular Vladislav Sulimsky in this score. He sounds younger, lighter and inevitably less extraordinary, albeit captured with greater fidelity and a more consistent measure of hall resonance. You certainly get a clearer impression of Denisov's spooky, forward-looking sonic palette; his timbres are generally lean until he lets rip with 'The Field Marshal'.

If Kitaenko's preference for colour over drama has not put you off you might even enjoy his slow-burning *Alexander Nevsky*. But however balefully his players evoke 'Russia under the Mongolian yoke', the lack of impetus is immediately apparent in the 'Song of Alexander Nevsky'. Gergiev in 2002 (Philips, 6/03) is more than a third faster. And Kitaenko's 'Crusaders in Pskov' are in no hurry either. Mezzo Agunda Kulaeva, fresh from the Bolshoi, is an effective, focused soloist in 'The Field of the Dead'. Then again, 'Alexander's entry into Pskov' really does feel implausibly sedate. Throughout, I hankered after an angrier and edgier choral timbre than that offered by the imported Czechs. It doesn't help that the notes and general presentation are plainly intended for the

German market, with none of the set texts provided whether in Russian, German or English. **David Gutman**

## Opalka

'Emerge'

Symphony No 2, 'Emerge'<sup>a</sup>. Collisions of the Matter<sup>b</sup>. DNA Bass Clarinet Concerto<sup>c</sup>. Quadra<sup>d</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Jadwiga Czarkowska *bass cl*<sup>d</sup>Polish Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz;

<sup>ab</sup>Polish Sinfonia Iuventus Orchestra /  
Krzysztof Słowiński; 'Warsaw Philharmonic

Artists' Chamber Orchestra of the Chain X  
Festival' / Wojciech Michniewski

Warner Classics (C) 9029 58832-2 (62' • DDD)

<sup>ab</sup>Recorded live at 'Philharmonic Hall, Warsaw,  
February 1, 2013; <sup>ab</sup>Witold Lutosławski Concert Hall  
of Polish Radio, <sup>b</sup>May 11, 2013, <sup>a</sup>May 10, 2014



As both the  
recording's title and  
the subtitle of one  
of its works suggest,

'Emerge' also appropriately signals the arrival of an exciting new voice in contemporary music. Born in 1983, Tomasz Jakub Opalka has been making waves in his native Poland for many years, especially after being awarded first prize at the 2010 Wawel Music Festival for the large-scale orchestral work *Spaces*.

Opalka then spent some time in Los Angeles working as understudy to established film composers Christopher Young and Marco Beltrami. The combination of traditional training in contemporary avant-garde techniques allied with hands-on experience of working on Hollywood soundtracks has produced a potent synthesis, demonstrating how closely related contemporary orchestral music and film soundtracks have become in the music of Opalka's generation.

His most intensely powerful and focused *Collisions of the Matter* (2012) for large orchestra conjures up a highly dynamic and volatile soundscape. It opens with a Big Bang-style effect – swirling fragments of sound clattering into one another before eventually subsiding on low pulsing Ds. The sound particles heard during the opening flourish then reappear as slowed down and in suspended animation.

If *Collisions of the Matter* is all about releasing sounds into air, Opalka's Symphony No 2, *Emerge*, attempts to draw them back in. It results in an epic struggle that eventually finds solace not so much in an identifiable pitch space or tonal epicentre but resolution in the power of pulse and rhythm. My only concern is that when the musical material seems unsure



Melodically generous and harmonically exploratory: Francesco Piemontesi plays Mozart with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Andrew Manze

where it wants to go, as sometimes occurs in the Concerto for bass clarinet, Opalka resorts to hackneyed film-score gestures.

The earliest composition on show, *Quadra* (2007), provides yet further evidence of Opalka's ability to conjure vivid sonic images through colourful and inventive orchestration. All the signs point to the emergence of one of new music's most creative and distinctive voices in a long while. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Schubert

'The Finished "Unfinished"

Symphony No 8, D759 (reconstr Venzago)

Basel Chamber Orchestra / Mario Venzago

Sony Classical © 88985 43138-2 (43' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Casino Basel Musiksaal, March 4, 2016



Mario Venzago explains that nobody knows why Schubert left the *Unfinished*

unfinished. In fact, in the booklet, he persuasively expounds his theory that the work *was* finished but, pressed for time when an urgent ballet commission came his way, the composer requested the return of

the finale to be pressed into use; that most of the Scherzo was sent as well and was subsequently lost is unfortunate, although the manuscript of the familiar torso ends with the first page of the third movement in fair copy. Venzago has reconstructed, from piano sketches, the Scherzo with two Trios and rescued the finale from the *Rosamunde* ballet music to reconstitute the four-movement symphony at least in its dimensions, if not fully in detail.

Thus the balance of the work is altered. Venzago deplores the tradition of performing it as two slow movements and accordingly takes the opening *Allegro moderato* faster than is often the case – only slightly slower, in fact, than he would take the first movement of the *Eroica*, with one rather than three beats in the bar. That's fair enough; and it's a fine performance (live last year) on its own terms – one that put me in mind of Thomas Dausgaard's Swedish CO recording (BIS, 8/10), on which the playing time of this opening movement is even faster.

Dausgaard, though, didn't have to balance the *Allegro moderato* as part of a four-part structure, although his near-gallop through it enabled him to squeeze the Eighth and Ninth on the same disc. Venzago offers a compelling reason for

this tempo and backs it up with sound reasoning. He makes it a valid exercise.

As is the projection of the third and fourth movements. Venzago considers the finale 'the most exciting in the whole symphony'; to me it seems a little foursquare in its material but that might be as much due to unfamiliarity with it as anything else. At a little over 43 minutes the disc is short measure: the concert opened with an overture and contained two orchestral Schubert songs and two Mozart arias with Regula Mühlemann; one regrets the omission of one or more of these.

David Threasher

## Steinberg

Violin Concerto, Op 37<sup>a</sup>.

Symphony No 4, 'Turksib', Op 24

<sup>a</sup>Sergey Levitin *vn*

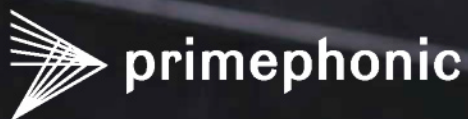
Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7341 (74' • DDD)



Maximilian Steinberg is usually remembered as Dmitry Shostakovich's composition teacher at the Petrograd Conservatory. Shostakovich's youthful





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Symphony No 1 was composed as a graduation exercise from Steinberg's class; but what of Steinberg the composer? Seen as the natural successor to Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov, Steinberg favoured a conservative style which soon saw him left behind by the likes of Igor Stravinsky. Between 1905 and 1942 Steinberg composed five symphonies, of which the first two have been recorded by that tireless musical explorer Neeme Järvi with the Gothenburg SO (DG, 11/99 – nla; 10/01). Another of Järvi's former orchestras, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, now offers the Fourth under Martin Yates on the enterprising Dutton label.

Like Reinhold Glière, Steinberg adapted to Communist party requirements, his 1933 Symphony No 4 celebrating the Turkestan-Siberia railway project which was completed in 1931. Each movement has a descriptive subtitle and Steinberg's music for 'Across Sands and Mountains' draws on Kazakh folk melodies. The 'Devil's Chariot' finale does a fair impression of a locomotive powering across the steppes. It's not the most memorable music but Yates draws exuberant playing from the RSNO.

Steinberg's Violin Concerto was composed in 1946 and was his final work. In some ways, it represents a step back to something more traditionally Romantic, certainly when compared with what Shostakovich would do with his First Violin Concerto the following year. Sergey Levitin, familiar to London audiences as co-concertmaster of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, is a fine advocate for the concerto, his clean tone well captured by the Dutton engineers. Levitin is particularly persuasive in the capricious rondo finale.

Guy Rickards's excellent booklet notes are a model of their kind, with lucid descriptions of Steinberg's music.

Mark Pullinger

## 'Elbphilharmonie Hamburg'

'The Opening Concert'

**Beethoven** Symphony No 9, Op 125 – Finale  
**Britten** Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op 49 – Pan  
**Caccini** Le nuove musiche – Amarilli mia bella  
**Cavaleri** La pellegrina – Dalle più alte sfere  
**Dutilleux** Mystère de l'instant – Appels; Échos;  
 Prismes  
**R Liebermann** Furioso  
**Messiaen** Turangalila-symphonie – Final  
**Praetorius** Quam pulchra es  
**Rihm** Reminiscenz Triptychon und Spruch in memoriam Hans Henny Jahnn  
**Wagner** Parsifal – Prelude  
**Zimmermann** Photoptosis

**Hanna-Elisabeth Müller** sop **Wiebke Lehmkuhl** mez  
**Philippe Jaroussky** counterten **Pavol Breslik** ten  
**Sir Bryn Terfel** bass **Iveta Apkalna** org  
**Ensemble Praetorius; NDR Chorus; Bavarian Radio Chorus; NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Thomas Hengelbrock**

Video director **Henning Kasten**

Disc 2: 'The Elbphilharmonie – Hamburg's New Landmark', a film by Thorsten Mack and Annette Schmalz

C Major Entertainment © 2 DVD 741408;

741504 (165' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live, January 11, 2017



Six years late, around €500m over budget and bathed in a soap-opera-worthy cauldron of lawsuits and

recriminations, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie was famous long before the first notes sounded at its grand Opening Concert back in January. However, hearing those first notes will remain one of the most magical and unforgettable concert experiences of many a hardened music critic's career: in place of a brightly lit, onstage colossus of a symphonic chord, darkness and the strains of a single oboe intoning Britten's 'Pan' from the back of one of the seating terraces. And as that bewitching string of notes floated and snaked its way around the silence, a second soloist revealed itself: the hall itself, because Yasuhisa Toyota's acoustics were of such high definition and intimacy that even in this 2100-seat space you could hear the faint tap of the oboe's key mechanism making contact with ebony. What then followed was programming genius: seamless segues between darkened-auditorium early chamber repertoire from the balconies, and lights-up, full-orchestra 20th- and 21st-century works from the stage, eventually climaxing with Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'. It felt like a once-in-a-century concert in a once-in-a-century hall.

And so to the DVD of that evening, and it's a mixed bag as to how much of all that has translated on to film. The concert's first pre-music moments are tainted by a rather offputting electronic rumble as if the engineers were still working out their game plan, but this quickly subsides. With regard to the digital translation of the hall's acoustics, it's a case of 'you win some, you lose some'. So while that oboe mechanism isn't so audible, the high-definition intimacy bristlingly reveals itself in the twang of harp and theorbo. Likewise, although the contemporary symphonic

textures have lost some of their extraordinary analytical lucidity, the bass – curiously muted that weekend within certain repertoire – is present, deep and rich. An unequivocal success is the way the drama of those leaps between the centuries remains absolutely undiluted; savour the violent punch of Rolf Liebermann's *Furioso* disappearing into Caccini's gosammer-weighted 'Amarilli mia bella'.

Moving on to the visuals, the hall's glowing white inner 'skin' appears slightly cooler at certain angles on film than in real life, but this is easily balanced out by the technicolour glisten of the exterior light displays. These look phenomenal, and are well worth stretching to the Blu-ray for.

Beyond the concert, to describe Thorsten Mack and Annette Schmalz's accompanying film as a mere 'bonus documentary' massively underplays its 52 minutes of fly-on-the-wall reportage. Filmed right from the very beginning, it unflinchingly documents the architectural and funding dramas as they unfolded, and follows some of the particularly noteworthy design and manufacturing processes. It then climaxes with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra themselves, and their emotional discovery that the acoustics of their new home will forever change the way they play and listen as an ensemble. It's great stuff.

As a concert recording this may not represent absolute as-it-was perfection but as a package with the documentary, and as a record of an extraordinary musical event, it comes highly recommended.

Charlotte Gardner

## 'An Eventful Morning in East London'

'21st Century Violin Concertos'

**Doolittle** falling still<sup>a</sup> **Fokkens** An Eventful Morning Near East London<sup>b</sup> **D Matthews**

**Romanza**<sup>a</sup> **Patterson** Allusions<sup>c</sup>

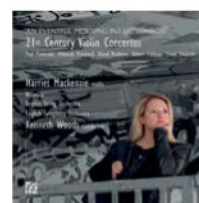
**Pritchard** Wall of Water<sup>d</sup>

**Harriet Mackenzie**, **Philippa Mo** vns

acd **English String Orchestra**; <sup>b</sup>**English Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods**

Nimbus Alliance © NI6295 (70' • DDD)

<sup>d</sup>From NI1555 (5/15)



The title is slightly confusing. This disc was recorded at

Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, and the location referred to in Robert Fokkens's entertaining violin concerto *An Eventful Morning Near East London* is the seaport in the Eastern Cape. Elsewhere on the same disc there's a



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concerto inspired by the paintings of Maggi Hambling, an evocation of a Canadian blackbird and a triptych by Paul Patterson that summons up the spirits of Don Giovanni, Figaro and Sir John Falstaff (Verdi's, not Shakespeare's). This latest, typically ambitious disc from Kenneth Woods and his resurgent English Symphony Orchestra is a lot more colourful than its distinctly urban artwork might suggest.

But of course you'll hear that as soon as Harriet Mackenzie – the dedicatee of several of the pieces collected here – and her duo partner Philippa Mo launch into the first movement of Patterson's *Allusions*. Soloists and orchestra alike play with bracing clarity and momentum; in fact, throughout this disc – whether in the transition into the riotous car-crash finale of Fokkens's piece or the long sunset fade of Deborah Pritchard's *Wall of Water* – the performances are skilfully paced and vividly characterised. Mackenzie isn't afraid of a bit of rosin and horsehair; conversely, in slower music such as the long, gradually welling cadenza that opens *Wall of Water* or the lush song of Emily Doolittle's *falling still*, she sustains a marvellously sweet and fluid tone.

Woods and his players accompany throughout with a keen sense of the music's shifting moods, and (in the quieter passages) playing of rapt refinement. As a survey of 21st-century violin concertos (everything here dates from between 2001 and 2014) in a broadly traditional idiom, it's an enjoyable package. The recorded sound is spacious and realistic. **Richard Bratby**

## 'In Schubert's Company'

**Akhunov** Der Erlkönig<sup>a</sup>. In Schubert's Company<sup>a</sup> **Desyatnikov** Wie der alte Leiermann ...<sup>a</sup> **Schubert** Polonaise, D580<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 5, D485<sup>a</sup>. Winterreise, D911 – Der Leiermann (arr Tabakova)<sup>a</sup>. Arpeggione Sonata, D821<sup>b</sup>. Violin Sonatina No 3, D408<sup>b</sup>

**Tabakova** Fantasy Homage to Schubert<sup>a</sup>

<sup>b</sup>**Yakov Katsnelson** pf<sup>a</sup> **Riga Sinfonietta** /

**Maxim Rysanov** va

Onyx ② ONYX4183 (116' • DDD)



First, a name to watch, if you're not already watching her, that is: Dobrinka Tabakova, Bulgarian-born, a prize-winning pupil of some of the finest living composers and who even now has a significant corpus of work to her name. Maxim Rysanov's collection 'In Schubert's Company'

includes an impressive Tabakova calling card, her *Fantasy Homage to Schubert*. Even among an elevated community of Schubert transcriptions and visitations – Zender's *Winterreise* and Berio's *Rendering*, reaching back to Joachim's *Grand Duo* and Felix Mottl's version of the *Fantasie* for piano duet – Tabakova's 11-minute tone picture, where ever so gradually the tremulous opening of the violin *Fantasie* emerges from the mists as if out of a dream, is a stroke of genius. It tails a spirited account of Schubert's Fifth Symphony where for the Trio of the Menuetto, after a marked ritenuto and a brief pause (2'06"), Rysanov and his Riga Sinfonietta slow the pulse and trace Schubert's dialoguing woodwind lines with unusual clarity.

Other novel variations on Schubert include Leonid Desyatnikov's *Wie der alte Leiermann* ..., 'a commentary, a sort of critique (in a positive sense)', as the composer himself puts it. For openers Rysanov sounds a harsh solo statement of the principal theme, before a community of strings gathers round in comforting support. Pärt-like in its effect, this winning piece levels with Tabakova's Fantasy for impact. As it happens, the programme is rounded off by her arrangement of that same song for viola and orchestra. Sergey Akhunov's *In Schubert's Company* is based on the *Adagio and Rondo concertante*, D487, while his more dramatic *Der Erlkönig* visits Schubert's ghostly dialogue without too much in the way of direct quotation but with a visceral pull that's easily a match for the original Lied.

Rysanov's own 'straight' transcriptions include the Arpeggione Sonata, the G minor Violin Sonata, D408, and the Polonaise in B flat, D580, all bearing witness to a humbling facility that allows the instrument access to a tonal range which runs the gamut from violinistic brilliance to a rich, nut-brown sonority suggestive of the middle registers of a cello. Agile, expressive and with a mastery of line and dynamics, Rysanov is a prince among viola players, and this is one of his finest albums to date. **Rob Cowan**

## 'Sommernachtskonzert'

**Dvořák** Carnival, Op 92. Armida – As I merrily pursued a gazelle<sup>a</sup>. Rusalka – Song to the Moon<sup>a</sup> **Humperdinck** Hänsel und Gretel – Overture **Rachmaninov** Never sing to me again, beautiful maiden, Op 4 No 4<sup>a</sup>. Spring Waters, Op 14 No 11<sup>a</sup>. Twilight, Op 21 No 3<sup>a</sup> **Smetana** The Bartered Bride – Dance of the Comedians **Stravinsky** The Firebird: Suite (1919) – Infernal Dance; Berceuse; Finale **Tchaikovsky** Sleeping Beauty, Op 66 – Pas d'action; Waltz **J Williams** Harry Potter – Hedwig's Theme

**Renée Fleming** sop **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Christoph Eschenbach**

Sony Classical ② 88985 42593-2 (85' • DDD)

Also available on DVD 88985 42594-9;

88985 42595-9

Recorded live at Schloss Schönbrunn, Vienna, May 25, 2017



The Vienna Philharmonic's Summer Night Concerts, open-air

affairs in front of Schönbrunn Palace, are now rushed on to the market almost as swiftly as their New Year's Day counterparts from the Musikverein. The 2017 event reunites the orchestra with Christoph Eschenbach, conductor also in 2014, for a programme of music all about magic and the supernatural, with a little extra stardust provided by Renée Fleming.

It's a mixed bag, in all senses. Things start well with a rousing account of Dvořák's *Carnival* overture (with some particularly fine playing in the melancholy central section), after which Fleming sings Armida's Act 1 aria from the composer's final opera. She does so seductively and stylishly, her trademark creamy tone now displaying a dash of extra sinew, but also slowly and indulgently. The same goes for a sugary, drawn-out account of Rusalka's Song to the Moon – Fleming takes over a minute longer here than she does on her Gramophone Award-winning recording of the role with Mackerras (Decca, 11/98).

Those performances rather set the tone. Eschenbach lets the *Hänsel und Gretel* prelude and *The Sleeping Beauty* numbers drag, and the orchestra's winds suffer from some suspect intonation in the former. The first two of a trio of Rachmaninov songs feel almost funereal, while Walter Mnatsakanov's busy arrangement of 'Spring Waters' occasionally risks drowning Fleming out.

Happily things pick up with 'Hedwig's Theme' from John Williams's music for *Harry Potter*, in which the Vienna strings swirl and swoop around their lines with evident relish, and Eschenbach is also more lively in the Stravinsky (the last three numbers of the 1919 *Firebird* Suite) and Smetana that follow.

The recorded sound is remarkably clear and airy, if short on bite, and distant applause from the Schönbrunn grounds is included. It was clearly fun to be there; but, listened to at home, this concert comes across as only intermittently satisfying. **Hugo Shirley**



# Mozart's Piano Concerto in C, K503

**Francesco Piemontesi** discusses one of the more elusive Mozart concertos with Hugo Shirley

The signs are encouraging when I meet Francesco Piemontesi in a café in the bustling heart of Berlin's Mitte district. The Swiss pianist arrives with not one score of Mozart's K503 Concerto, but two: a standard two-piano version from Edition Peters as well as an Urtext study score published by Bärenreiter. Both are filled with markings. Some are in German, while I also spot several instances of 'non correre' – don't rush – dotted through the virtuosic *Allegretto* finale.

Born in Locarno, Piemontesi was brought up trilingual in German, Italian and French. He was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2009 to 2011, and on his scores there are markings in English, too. Many of these, he says, come from working with Andrew Manze, who conducts the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in his new recording of this concerto, coupled with its successor, the *Coronation*, K537, on Linn Classics.

As he leafs through the Bärenreiter score, a folded photocopied sheet of handwritten music drops out. 'Brendel's cadenza,' he notes casually, 'but I never performed it' – the great Austrian pianist has long been a mentor. I ask him about the other markings, many of them noted in the orchestral parts. 'I think this comes from Mehta,' he says, pointing to some articulation in the flute line, which he proceeds to sing; 'this is from Brendel,' he says several pages later, pointing to semi-staccato markings on the C minor theme first heard in the orchestra at bar 50, which forms the basis for the first movement's astonishing development section.

Composed in 1786, shortly after Mozart completed *Le nozze di Figaro*, K503 was the last of the major Mozart concertos Piemontesi discovered, he tells me. He was 17 when a friend gave him Martha Argerich's recording, captured live at the Concertgebouw in 1978: 'I immediately went to the music shop, bought the music and started playing it through'. He first performed it, he remembers, 'aged 20 or 21'. His love for the work is unmistakable, and clearly deeply considered. But in the 230 years of its existence, the concerto has had its fair share of detractors.

I ask why. 'I cannot give you an answer,' Piemontesi replies, 'in that I really don't know. Many musicians have asked me, and I've asked *them* the same question. But it's fascinating – and a little frustrating – that every time I used to propose the piece, orchestras would say, "Thank you very much, we've not played it since 1975" or something!'



Piemontesi recording with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Andrew Manze

'The melodic material is wonderful and is organised and elaborated in a wonderful way,' he continues, while also conceding that it is not a 'hit parade' in the way that some of its neighbouring works in the composer's output are. He turns to the concerto's opening pages, scored grandly for an orchestra that, unusually, includes trumpets as well as a full complement of wind instruments. 'I think the first feature is actually this "official" mode,' he says. 'It's a mode that is almost military – the scale and the sense of pomp.' And this, he explains, extends also to the way the material is laid out. 'It's a piece full of contrasts, but there are many places where you don't have a transition, even though Mozart was normally a great master of transitions.'

But within this context, he notes, Mozart creates 'islands of peace, of lyricism'. There's one in the finale, in the gentle F major theme (bar 163) that follows the central section's initial turn into A minor. Another is a haunting few bars in the *Andante*, where the piano's right hand picks delicate off-beat 10ths – from C to E, then D to F – before the flute takes over and the soloist weaves a delicate accompaniment (bars 51–6).



## The historical view

**Eric Blom**  
*Mozart (1935)*

'The work is a disappointment. It is interesting for some ... technical problems which make it on the whole the most difficult of all the piano concertos, but the performer is not sufficiently repaid...it is all rather frigid and comparatively unoriginal.'

**Charles Rosen**  
*The Classical Style (1971)*

'The ... impression of tranquil power and lyricism is unique in music before Beethoven. The emotion is less poignant than in some of the other concertos, but it is the combination of breadth and subtlety that has made this work so admired.'

**Philip Radcliffe**  
*Mozart Piano Concertos (1978)*

'K503 ... can only be described as epic ... The first movement has an astonishing breadth and spaciousness. Its air of formality is misleading, as what appear to be purely conventional gestures are liable at any moment to digress into unexpected paths.'

And it is this movement – ‘distilled simplicity, like a good grappa, and incredibly beautiful’ – where the ‘block-like’ fashion in which Mozart assembles his material is most evident, Piemontesi says. ‘But the miracle of all this is that it all fits together!’


As we talk, though, we agree on a characteristic that is often noted about the work: the melodic material might initially seem unpromising, but it is manipulated in the most unexpected ways. One example is that aforementioned C minor theme in the first movement, which grows out of a simple repeated-note idea. It has variously been compared to Papageno’s ‘Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen’ from *Die Zauberflöte* and ‘La Marseillaise’, and at a mention of the link to the French national anthem Piemontesi lights up: ‘That was written in 1792, but 10 years ago, an Italian musicologist found a piece by [Giovanni Battista] Viotti: his Theme and Variations in C major, written in 1781.’

He reaches for his mobile phone and plays me the beginning of the piece from a recording on YouTube – it is essentially a genteel string-orchestra version of the familiar tune. ‘Rouget de Lisle only wrote the text,’ Piemontesi explains, ‘and we know Mozart appreciated Viotti...who knows?’ Either way, Piemontesi is fond of quoting the French national anthem when he performs his own cadenza in concert performances, although he decided against that when he brought the piece to the recording studio, opting for Friedrich Gulda’s cadenza instead.

*‘The Andante is distilled simplicity, like a good grappa, and incredibly beautiful’*

Then the conversation turns to Beethoven, whose own concertos the piece anticipates in many ways. ‘This is very interesting,’ Piemontesi says as we look at the piano’s first entry in the opening movement, ‘and something which Beethoven will do in his First and Second Concertos, where the piano comes in as a *primus inter pares* – it doesn’t punch you in the face!’

Later we examine the triplets that proliferate with infectious energy in the finale. ‘It’s so unpianistic, you cannot imagine,’ Piemontesi says of some of the more awkward left-hand figures. ‘You practise, then you do the sign of the cross and just hope you hit them all!’ He nevertheless sometimes adds a mischievous touch in the coda in performance, mapping similar triplet figures from the first movement of Beethoven’s *Waldstein* Sonata onto Mozart’s: ‘It’s really one-to-one, and conductors, if they know the Beethoven, start laughing when I do it.’ Some might be sorry to read that this doesn’t make it onto the recording either, although he does include extra ornamentation and improvisation, a decision he backs up with reference to an impressive array of sources.

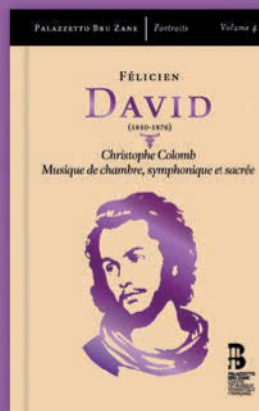
It’s the concerto’s special character that we return to at the end of our conversation. It seems to boil down to a certain ambiguity: grandeur is constantly undercut; the stability of C major is routinely questioned, not only by modulations elsewhere, but also by obsessive, almost Schubertian switches between major and minor – a tendency that Charles Rosen has called the piece’s ‘dominant colour’. ‘I think the overall impression that you take away from the piece is something positive,’ Piemontesi concludes. ‘But it’s like Mona Lisa’s smile – you never know!’ 

► Read our review of Francesco Piemontesi’s Mozart Concertos disc on page 56

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# Chamber



**Peter Quantrill explores Reger's engaging clarinet sonatas:**

*'The Scherzo babbles along like a Black Forest brook, with an affable humour that may come as a surprise'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



**Alexandra Coghlan enters the spirit of The Alehouse Sessions:**

*'Their instinctive, playful communication and delight in one another's skill amplifies their individual performances'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**

## JS Bach • Buxtehude

**JS Bach** Musikalisches Opfer, BWV1079

**Buxtehude** Trio Sonata No 6, BuxWV257

**The Bach Players / Nicolette Moonen** *vn*

Hyphen Press © HPM011 (54' • DDD)



We'll never know for sure why Bach's *Musical Offering*, a collection of short

pieces all composed to a theme improvised to him by Frederick the Great, is sequenced so very unusually and unevenly in its first print edition of 1747. Did Bach really intend to split his 10 canons around the *ricercars* and sonata in this strange 1+5+1+2+1 order, or was it a random grouping for players to rearrange *ad libitum*? And while we're on the subject of mysteries, did he really intend that the set's only stipulated instrumentation – flute and violin plus basso continuo for the sonata – be applied to the whole, or did he assume the other members of Frederick's musical household would contribute across the rest?

Whatever the answer, The Bach Players have certainly built an exceptionally thoughtful programme from the theory that the collection's unusual sequence is in fact Bach's quite deliberate musical working out of the Roman writer Quintilian's theories on rhetoric; and, interestingly, the moment you view this supposedly wonky ordering of contrasting musical styles as the successive chunks of a persuasive oratory, you can also stick to flute, violin and basso continuo throughout – as The Bach Players have done – without things becoming samey.

So that's it really; it's through variations of articulation, tone and mood that the musical argument is grown and our interest maintained, all done with a courtly seriousness and fluidity that will particularly appeal to those who appreciate a playing style on the lighter, leaner end of the scale. Also worth pointing out is that by giving the first canon's presentation of the theme to the flute they've acknowledged

the Frederick the Great connection more strongly than has been the recorded norm.

Certainly there are perkier (Musica Antiqua Köln) and fruitier (Ricercar Consort) readings out there; but if it's an elegant evening drawing-room intellectualism you're after, then this hits the spot perfectly; and to have preceded their Bach with an earlier rhetorical Baroque gem, Buxtehude's Sonata No 6, they've beautifully cemented their case.

**Charlotte Gardner**

*Bach – selected comparisons:*

*Musica Antiqua Köln*, Goebel

(11/79\*) (DG) 469 680-2GEL

*Ricercar Consort* (5/15) (MIRA) MIR237

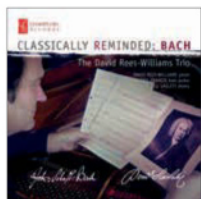
## JS Bach • D Scarlatti

**'Classically Reminded'**

**JS Bach** Cantata No 147 – Jesu, joy of man's desiring. French Suite No 5, BWV816 – Allemande; Gigue; Loure. Invention, BWV785. Sinfonias – BWV792; BWV795; BWV797. Toccata, Adagio and Fugue, BWV564 – Toccata; Adagio. Das wohltemperirte Clavier: Preludes – BWV867; BWV869 (two versions); BWV878 **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas – Kk239; Kk492

**The David Rees-Williams Trio**

Champs Hill © CHRCD128 (71' • DDD)



There's a fine tradition of JS Bach-inspired jazz piano, from Hazel Scott and John Lewis

to Jacques Loussier and Dave Brubeck, and with the worlds of both Bach and jazz being so very infinite the fountain of fresh insights is unlikely ever to run dry.

David Rees-Williams's 'Classically Reminded' Bach jazz trio arrangements are certainly unique, too: 13 Bach melodies subjected to a 'light, jazz-inspired treatment', his overall aim to 'expose far more of the romantic nature of these great melodies'. To distinctiveness you can then add exemplary written communication, because flip through the booklet and you'll find each Bach starter melody written out in staff notation, accompanied by Rees-

Williams's chatty and knowledgeable notes on what aspects of it he's then chosen to develop. Still, his apparently perfectly earnest description of the Fifth *French Suite*'s Loure as 'cloyingly romantic' did make me chuckle, not least because by the time it appeared at track 3 I was already feeling very much as though I should be perched, Bellini in hand, at a suitably plush chain hotel piano bar; a feeling hammered home by the pedal-rich 'Jesu, joy of man's desiring' at track 5, with its broken chords, easy-listening harmonies and organ (synthesised, methinks?) background cushion.

It's not that there isn't plenty of up-tempo stuff on here, not least two peppy Scarlatti sonatas (in D major, Kk492, and F minor, Kk239) that have been added to set Bach in some contemporary context. You also can't fault the skill on display: the wealth of jazz and classical expertise underpinning every arrangement, Rees-Williams's own silky jazz touch and the lovingly oiled artistic synergy between him, Neil Francis on bass and Phil Laslett on drums. However, anyone who prefers their jazz to come with a touch of edge may find this a tad too soft-focus.

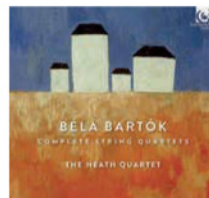
**Charlotte Gardner**

## Bartók

**Complete String Quartets**

**The Heath Quartet**

Harmonia Mundi © 2 HMM90 7661/2 (158' • DDD)



This is a major release. Last year I heard The Heath Quartet play Bartók's

Third Quartet in concert, and was struck not only by their obvious mastery of Bartók's idiom but also by the exuberant sense of fantasy – indeed, joy – that they brought to the music. This complete cycle, recorded in May 2016 in the Wigmore Hall before the departure of their original second violinist, Cerys Jones, more than delivers on the promise of the group's live performances



David Rees-Williams and his Trio add to the rich tradition of jazzified Bach

and their *Gramophone* Award-winning Tippett cycle (Wigmore Hall Live, 3/16).

The Heaths follow the relatively recent interpretative approach (typified by the Emerson Quartet's 1988 cycle) that views these works primarily as part of the classical tradition. Their playing isn't as glossy, perhaps, as other recent entrants into this field, such as the Jerusalem Quartet, but they have a powerful understanding of the music's structure, coupled to superlative technical skill. Sensibly, they don't try to fake a Hungarian accent: instead, their awareness of the music's roots is incorporated into a wider expressive language. In the first two quartets, for example, there's a sort of *Jugendstil* curvaceousness – enhanced by Oliver Heath's lustrous tone plus discreet ensemble portamentos – that places these works in the context of Austro-Hungarian late Romanticism. The peppery fiddle tune that launches the Scherzo of the Second Quartet buzzes with folk intensity but, crucially, keeps moving forwards.

In fact, I found myself repeatedly scribbling down the word 'momentum'. Not necessarily in the sense of relentless energy (though they can heat things up when they need to), but of an inevitable pull towards the culminating moment when a movement

suddenly yields up its secrets. That makes for a powerfully vivid and focused account of the Third Quartet, and a Fifth Quartet that, not entirely predictably, comes across as the lightest of the set. But elsewhere, it's devastating: the tear-stained climax of the first movement of the First Quartet, the sudden, poignant fade at the end of the first movement of the Sixth and the piercing stab of pain in that work's closing bars. They play the impassioned solos of the Fourth's central *Non troppo lento* relatively straight: the ardour grows from within, culminating in a final, misty vision of nocturnal stillness that is – no other word for it – magical.

It's all captured by Harmonia Mundi in transparent and natural recorded sound which easily encompasses both the quietest *sul ponticello* whisper and (a Heath Quartet speciality) ringing full-ensemble chords that glow from within. Newcomers to the Bartók quartets will find this a sincere, imaginative and splendidly played entry point; old hands will quickly find 101 new reasons why these extraordinary works rank among the supreme achievements of 20th-century music. **Richard Bratby**

*String Quartets* – selected comparison:

*Emerson Qt* (12/88<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 477 6322GGP2

*Nos 2, 4 & 6* – selected comparison:

*Jerusalem Qt* (12/16) (HARM) HMC90 2235

## Beethoven

'Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin, Vol 3'

Three Sonatas, Op 30

Susanna Ogata *vp* Ian Watson *fp*

Coro Connections © COR16154 (70' • DDD)



'Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin' declares the cover of this latest release in

Ian Watson and Susanna Ogata's cycle of what some people still call the Beethoven violin sonatas. Quite right too – not merely because they're performed on period instruments but because it's a useful corrective to the idea that one instrument is necessarily dominant in these works by the 31-year-old Beethoven. They're a partnership; and that, happily, is exactly what you get in these joyous interpretations.

A thoroughly appealing one, too, with Ogata audibly playing off the colours that Watson draws from his instrument, and he in turn complementing her clear, sunlit sound. Duncan Druce, reviewing an earlier release in this cycle, found Watson's playing over-emphatic, and I take his point: there are individual



chords and gestures where Watson almost bursts the bounds of early 19th-century style. But there's subtlety and continual alertness too – the sense of mystery he conjures in the solo phrase that opens Op 30 No 2 and the understated way he shades the second movement of Op 30 No 1 away into silence. In the C minor tempests of Op 30 No 2, he's able to evoke rolling thunder without any loss in rhythmic clarity.

And Ogata is with him every step of the way: witty, responsive, making the tops of phrases gleam. There's something positively gleeful about the way the pair deliver the opening gambit of Op 30 No 3, and the same sonata's Haydnesque finale practically swings. Among period-instrument pairings, Midori Seiler and Jos van Immerseel possibly offer a more intimate perspective: more of a sense of Biedermeier salon music. But with Ogata and Watson the music sounds freshly made, and I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed it. **Richard Bratby**

*Selected comparison:*

Seiler, Immerseel (11/12) (ZZT) ZZT307

## Brahms

String Sextets – No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 36

**Mandelring Quartet** with **Roland Glassl** *va*

**Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt** *vc*

Audite © AUDITE97 715 (72' • DDD)



Hot on the heels of the superb Erato recording with the Capuçon brothers

et al comes this energetic account of Brahms's two sextets by the expanded Mandelring Quartet. With their wide-eyed exuberance, the Mandelring remind us that these are youthful masterworks. Only in the opening movement of the First Sextet do they push too hard; there's not much *ma non troppo* in this *Allegro*. Then, at bar 43 (1'03"), Brahms writes *tranquillo*, more as an expressive instruction than a tempo-change. The Mandelring don't pay heed to this marking; but a few pages later, at bar 85 (2'09"), with a similarly notated *animato*, they lurch into an even higher gear.

That said, there's a fervour to these performances that's quite special – and the remaining tempo choices, while nearly always on the brisk side, are ultimately convincing. Technically, the playing is exceptional in its tonal beauty and purity of intonation. Listen to cellist Bernhard Schmidt's glorious, singing sound at 1'57" in the finale of the First

Sextet, and then to the glistening tone and spot-on tuning of violinist Sebastian Schmidt in the exposed, high-lying passage at 5'58". This refinement coupled with clean articulation helps clarify thick textures, and the often intricate instrumental interplay is managed seamlessly. The themes in the finale of the Second Sextet are juggled so deftly and with such lyrical abandon as to induce a joyous adrenaline rush. This intensity has as much to do with expressive warmth and attention to detail as it does with panache and polish – note, for example, those little, heart-tugging mordents that ornament the main melody in the Scherzo of Op 36.

I wouldn't want to be without the Erato disc, as the Capuçon-led interpretations get straight to the heart of these *gemütlich* scores. But this exquisitely engineered Audite recording offers a fresh perspective that, in terms of musicianship and execution, comes very close to perfection.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Selected comparison:*

R & G Capuçon et al (6/17) (ERAT) 9029 58883-7

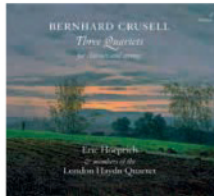
## Crusell

Clarinet Quartets – Op 2; Op 4; Op 7

**Eric Hoeprich** *cls*

members of the **London Haydn Quartet**

Glossa © GCD920609 (68' • DDD)



The concertos of the Finnish-Swedish clarinetist Bernhard Henrik Crusell

(1775-1838) come around fairly often; less so his chamber works. These three quartets come from the first 20 or so years of the 19th century and so sit roughly between the sound worlds of Mozart and Brahms, two composers who were themselves, of course, inspired by local clarinet virtuosos to create a handful of masterpieces.

There's certainly a faintly proto-Brahmsian air to the hymn-like opening of Op 7 in D, which then relaxes into something more playful; and there's something of the German Romantic hunt in the same work's finale. Mozart is the guiding spirit in the more pastoral Op 2 in E flat, especially in the rapt slow movement. And perhaps Haydn's example has a hand in the *Sturm und Drang* of the C minor Quartet, Op 4. Eric Hoeprich uses replicas of the 10-key Grenser clarinets that Crusell favoured; an instrument in A for Op 7 and the more

normal B flat model for the other two works. Wider tone holes add to the instruments' colouristic range, whether in the *cantabile* lines of the slow movements, the athletics of the *allegros* or that wonderful gurgling accompanimental sound that so suits the clarinet.

You hear some key action and occasionally catch the slight awkwardness of the cross-fingerings necessary on the pre-Böhm system, which only adds to the fun. Three-quarters of the gut-string London Haydn Quartet warm their sound with the merest hints of vibrato although, as so often, their instruments are not described in the documentation. Nevertheless, entirely enjoyable.

**David Thresher**

## Fauré

Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 109; No 2, Op 117.

Andante, Op 69<sup>a</sup>. Berceuses – Op 16; Op 56 No 1.

Élégie, Op 24. Morceau de lecture<sup>b</sup>. Papillon,

Op 77. Romance, Op 69. Sérénade, Op 98.

Sicilienne, Op 78

**Andreas Brantelid**, <sup>b</sup>**Filip Graden** *vcs*

**Bengt Forsberg** *pf<sup>a</sup>harm*

BIS © BIS2220 (70' • DDD/DSD)



This is a comprehensive collection of Fauré's 'official' music

for cello and piano – which is to say, it excludes some of the song transcriptions (though not an anonymous transcription of the Berceuse from *Dolly*) that sometimes get bundled in with the two sonatas and *Élégie*, but includes some relative rarities, among them the tiny *Morceau de lecture* for two cellos of 1897 (with Filip Graden playing the second part), and the original version of the Romance, Op 69, scored – deliciously – for cello and harmonium. In short, it's a well-planned programme.

Brantelid and Forsberg take a decidedly anti-Romantic view of Fauré. These are urgent, rhythmically driven performances that can feel – particularly in the two sonatas – almost subversive. Part of that is down to the tempos, which are generally swift, but Forsberg's approach is a factor too. Crisp, bright, at times percussive, his playing in the First Sonata reminds you that this work postdates *Petrushka*. Forget muted Impressionist colours; some of the sounds he makes (listen to his clangorous final climax in the first movement of the Second Sonata, for just one example) will not be to all tastes.

Brantelid, meanwhile, can certainly spin a long melodic line, and his throaty tone gives an attractive sense of shade to the music. But he's just as restless as his partner. The central section of the *Élégie* is practically violent, and at one point even the Berceuse from *Dolly* takes on an angry edge. It's all latent in the music after all; and if you're intrigued by the idea of Fauré with teeth – and can tolerate a certain amount of extramusical noise from the two players – you might well enjoy this disc.

Richard Bratby

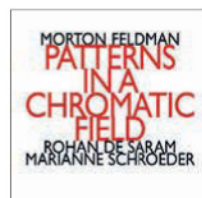
## Feldman

Patterns in a Chromatic Field

Rohan de Saram *vc* Marianne Schroeder *pf*

hat[now]ART ② HATNOWART2204 (105' • DDD)

Recorded 1993



This 1993 recording of Morton Feldman's cello-and-piano piece *Patterns in a Chromatic*

*Field* (1981) is a pioneering document, a recording released during a period when Feldman was famous for being little-known and not the all-pervasive presence he is today. At the time Marianne Schroeder had recorded Feldman's solo piano music for the label (alongside music by John Cage and Anthony Braxton) while Rohan de Saram, whose day job was cellist in the Arditti Quartet, had been playing with the British free improvisation group AMM, an ensemble with an aesthetic that had connections to Feldman's own and whose pianist, John Tilbury, was also a Feldman specialist. And all those connections implied that Feldman orbited around a new music parallel universe.

Since 1993 other top-notch versions of the score have emerged, mostly noticeably Charles Curtis and Aleck Karis on Tzadik and Deirdre Cooper with John Tilbury on Matchless – labels which, like HatArt, straddle improvised and composed new music (Christian Giger and Steffen Schleiermacher's coldly professional take is best avoided – MDG, 5/16). But this recording remains the yardstick. Feldman said, issuing one of those enigmatic aphorisms at which he excelled, that this piece 'is very related to serialism, but also to medieval disciplines of the Kabbalah', and de Saram and Schroeder play expertly with the freedoms licensed by Feldman's rigour. The first thing you notice is de Saram sheathing the customary high-register timbre of a cello with a warping falsetto – Feldman's demands of tessitura (supersonic high harmonics) and his

well-chosen microtones demand such a response.

Charles Curtis is equally willing to challenge his cello's comfort zone but de Saram and Schroeder ultimately dive deeper into the work's mysteries. Abrupt switches of timbre are clearly demarcated, flinging the music back into process, back into the thrilling unknown. And yet you're never left in doubt about the essentials of the overall structure – gestures that don't necessarily belong together welded into place, with the joins unseen. Philip Clark

## Franck · Poulenc · Saint-Saëns

Franck Violin Sonata Poulenc Violin Sonata

Saint-Saëns Violin Sonata No 1, Op 75

Guillaume Combet *vn* Sandra Carlock *pf*

Somm ② SOMMCD0169 (76' • DDD)



'Frankly no good': Poulenc's verdict on his only Violin Sonata was damning, but

there's no reason why we have to accept it. Written during the Second World War and dedicated to the memory of Lorca, it's actually a work of considerable originality, in which the darkness of its subject (and perhaps Poulenc's own dislike of the medium) constantly challenges and undercuts the composer's instinctive craftsmanship and wit. Its ambiguities grow more fascinating with repeated hearings.

So it's good to find it here: a more imaginative coupling for the Franck Sonata than the usual Fauré. In fact, it's the highlight of the disc. The American-based Carlock-Combet duo has all the qualities necessary for this repertoire: Combet's violin tone is rich and fluid, and Sandra Carlock commands a generous palette of keyboard colours, while Somm's recording captures the piano sound, in particular, with realism and warmth. Their reading of the Poulenc is swift, volatile and ardent, with just enough of an edge of harshness in Combet's playing to capture the work's latent anger. The pair generate a powerfully sinister atmosphere in the outer sections of the central Intermezzo.

Saint-Saëns's First Sonata rounds off the disc, and this dramatic performance is a useful corrective for anyone who still thinks of this composer as the epitome of bland Gallic polish – the *moto perpetuo* opening of the finale positively crackles with energy. If only the same could be said for the pair's languorous, at times

almost static performance of the Franck. Momentum drains from the inner movements, and that ravishing finale feels laboured. It's listenable enough but the other performances on this disc suggest that it could have been a great deal more.

Richard Bratby

## Gough

The World Encompassed, interspersed with music by Alberti, Anonymous, Parsons, Picforth, Taverner and White

Simon Callow *narr* Fretwork

Signum ② SIGCD453 (81' • DDD)



When Francis Drake set sail in 1577 to circumnavigate the globe, he took

with him four violists and sundry other musicians. Their job was chiefly diplomatic – demonstrating power, skill, friendship and Christianity to the nations they visited, and playing the songs, dances and hymns of home to maintain the morale of their own crew along the way. The voyage was recorded (very imperfectly) by Drake's nephew in a book, *The World Encompassed*, and it's this account that forms the basis of Orlando Gough's brilliantly uncategorisable project for the viol consort Fretwork.

Part music theatre, part Elizabethan grand tour, *The World Encompassed* is a through-composed work that embraces English Tudor music – *In nomine*, hornpipes, hymn tunes and pavaues – alongside the sounds of Drake's many destinations. Javanese gamelan, Indian dances, a swaying samba and a hypnotic Berber ritual song are all reimagined by Gough using only six viols and the voices of their players. It's the musical equivalent of being asked to make a raft out of plastic bottles and paperclips, a challenge Gough meets with all his customary wit and invention. It's also tremendous fun.

This mixture of old and new, familiar and alien, really shouldn't work; but, stitched together by Simon Callow's characterful narration, it forms an exotic tapestry – a vivid portrait of the age of exploration. Juxtaposed with Gough's glittering new sounds, Fretwork's regular repertoire of Taverner and Parsons comes up gleaming fresh, solid as oak furniture and just as sturdy – craftsmanship that swells the heart. Sometimes it takes a voyage to distant lands to appreciate what you have back home. Alexandra Coghlan



## Haydn

String Quartets, 'Sun', Op 20 - No 4; No 5; No 6  
**Chiaroscuro Quartet**  
 BIS (BIS2168 (75' • DDD/DSO))



The 40-year-old Haydn seems to have conceived his Op 20 quartets as a showcase for his newly won technical and expressive virtuosity in the medium he made his own. Endlessly unpredictable in topic and texture, these three works alone range from the gypsy antics of No 4's Minuet and finale, via the pathos and contrapuntal cerebration of No 5, to the al fresco exuberance of No 6's opening *Allegro*. As on their disc of Nos 1-3 (A/16), the cosmopolitan Chiaroscuro Quartet, playing on gut strings with minimal vibrato, combine refined ensemble and intonation with an audible delight in the music's richness and inspired subversiveness. Like all the best Haydn players, including the two period-instrument quartets listed below, they are constantly prepared to be surprised by the composer's teeming invention.

If you know these works well, you may initially raise an eyebrow at some of the Chiaroscuro's interpretative choices. Haydn marks the first movement of No 6 *Allegro di molto e scherzando*, though you'd barely guess it from a performance in which whimsy and delicacy rule over *scherzando* high spirits. The robustly sinewy *Mosaïques* and the fleet, mercurial London Haydn Quartet inhabit a different world here. From its secretive opening, with the four players sounding like a viol consort, the *Allegro di molto* first movement of No 4 is also unusually flexible and *innig*. I wouldn't always want to hear it like this, though there are many rewards in the eloquent shaping of phrases and the timing and shading of cadences. Controversial, too, is the fugal finale of No 6, where the Chiaroscuro eschew the comic implications of the leaping main theme and find an unexpected wistful tenderness in the music: it's touching, and certainly valid on its own terms.

If the Chiaroscuro's refinement and subtlety can sometimes short-change Haydn's animal spirits, they tear into No 4's lopsided gypsy Minuet, relishing the raw resonance of the open strings; and, playing fast and loose with the tempo (repeats, as ever, are a cue for new thinking), they gleefully milk the finale's antic mayhem. The F minor, No 5, is compelling throughout: from

the elegiac breadth of the opening *Moderato*, shaped in long paragraphs, through Alina Ibragimova's sense of fantasy in the siciliano *Adagio* (vindicating an unusually mobile tempo), to the fugal finale, where the players' tense, contained *sotto voce* aligns it with the mood of the opening movement. In sum, the Chiaroscuro, sometimes controversial, always illuminating, nicely complement their two period-instrument rivals. All three versions, each with its own distinctive insights, demand concentrated and, as the 18th century put it, 'philosophical' listening. Which is exactly as it should be in these inexhaustible works. **Richard Wigmore**

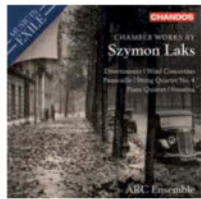
*Selected comparisons:*

*Mosaïques Qt (5/93) (NAIV) E8802*

*London Haydn Qt (A/11) (HYPE) CDA67877*

## Laks

String Quartet No 4. Divertimento. Piano Sonatina. Concertino. Passacaille. Piano Quintet  
**ARC Ensemble**  
 Chandos (CHAN10983 (83' • DDD))



Volume 3 of the ARC Ensemble's Music in Exile series profiles Szymon

Laks, who moved to Paris from Warsaw in the 1920s but was sent in 1942 to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he immersed himself in musical activities and was spared death and hard labour as a result.

The experience must have been horrific even so. But it's hard to say with any certainty how it infiltrated Laks's music. He was always a pragmatic composer; his background working in cafés and on ships meant his writing in Auschwitz could draw on the 'odeon' technique of orchestrating for any permutation of instruments. The pre-war Sonatina for piano (1927) is the most interesting work here; four movements journeying from an austere *Moderato* built on stringent neoclassical counterpoint to a big-boned *Allegro* with shades of Debussy's modality.

Laks's String Quartet No 4 (1962) reveals his geographical loyalties most clearly, with Slavic melodies cast in light, elegant French style and played with an attractive sepia tone. Sometimes the harmonies close in on themselves, edging towards the pain of the post-traumatic stress Laks clearly experienced. His *Passacaille* (1945) speaks most clearly of that.

There is similar focus and technique at play in the Concertino (1965) for three winds, but it can sound like a study. I hear rather more than the 'cheerful divertissement' that the booklet note describes in Laks's Piano Quintet (1967), an arrangement of the String Quartet No 3 from the pivotal year of 1945. There is argument in the opening *Allegro*, something chilling in the ghostly *Lento*, sure signs of the composer's rhythmic (popular) modernity in the *Vivace* and even a fugue in the finale. ARC play the piece with an ear for both the shifting moods and the technical rigour. But it's hard to get away from the idea that while Laks's plenteous abilities made him an indispensable 20th-century musical functionary in the moment, in the long term he might not have had an awful lot to say.

**Andrew Mellor**

## Mellits

String Quartets - No 3, 'Tapas'; No 4, 'Prometheus'; No 5, 'Waniyetu'  
**Debussy Quartet**  
 Evidence (EVCD033 (55' • DDD))



The American composer Marc Mellits cut his creative teeth transcribing

Steve Reich while absorbing the music of post-minimalists such as Michael Gordon. The result, as heard on this engaging and invigorating recording of three quartets spanning eight years, is a compelling synthesis that balances the process-driven approach of the former with the gritty, block-like structures of the latter. At times Mellits incorporates a third element in the form of romantically charged lyricism. All three are heard in the composer's Quartets Nos 3, 4 and 5, played on this recording with a combination of poise, power and élan by the Debussy Quartet.

Composed in 2008, Mellits's culinary-inspired Third Quartet (*Tapas*) shares the rhythmic energy and contrapuntal clarity of works written around the same time, as heard on 'Tight Sweater' (Endeavour Classics, 2006) and 'Paranoid Cheese' (Black Box, 10/07). The Debussy Quartet spring into life by pouncing purposefully on a single repeated C pitch. This abrasive style is continued during the fourth and seventh movements. In between, more introspective aspects are explored, such as the fifth-movement series of variations on a three-chord pattern which playfully alternates between major and minor resolutions.



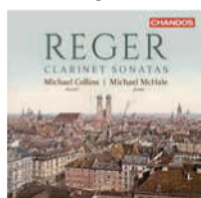
Michael Collins and Michael McHale bring nobility to Reger's clarinet sonatas in their recording for Chandos

Despite its fiery subtitle, *Prometheus*, Mellits's Quartet No 4 (2011), remains a more subtle and delicate work until the arrival of an explosive finale. Mellits moves away from his early trademark miniaturist mode to a broader canvas, where lines are given more time and space to take shape. The Fifth Quartet, *Wanîyetu* (2015), takes its title from the native American Lakota word for winter, which can be biting cold in northerly parts of the American Midwest. Mellits again holds back during the opening movements before unleashing a blizzard of interlocking patterns over a powerful pulsing chord sequence in a final, impressive flourish. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Reger

Clarinet Sonatas - Op 49 No 1; Op 49 No 2; Op 107

Michael Collins *cls* Michael McHale *pf*  
Chandos © CHAN10970 (72' • DDD)



A cautionary tale, courtesy of Nicholas Marston's booklet note: Reger

bartered the dedication of his First Clarinet Sonata to a local critic in exchange for some good reviews. The critic then forgot his promise, or recovered his conscience. Either way, after reading of the critic's lukewarm reaction to the Op 39 Choruses, Reger got the hump and scratched out the dedication.

Michael Collins should have little to fear from modern-day Beckmessers. The second-movement Scherzo of that sonata bubbles along like a Black Forest brook, with an affable humour that may come as a surprise to listeners familiar only with Reger's organ music or his dyspeptic glare in photographs. Here and in the beautifully weighted chords of the small, slow Trio, the partnership of Collins and Michael McHale sets this disc apart from the modern competition. After all, not the least pertinent resemblance between Reger's three sonatas and the earlier pair of Brahms is the unequal division of labour: like a duck paddling along that brook, the pianist must work harder to complement the serene cast of the clarinet gliding above.

Despite the key of F sharp minor, No 2 mostly retains the warmth of the First Sonata, though Collins takes care to withdraw his tone a little in the *Allegro dolente* first movement and maximise what little tension may be found against the richly chromatic piano part. He unerringly finds the simple songs amid the compulsive modulations – in another brief Trio and another *Larghetto* of passing clouds – and always sings them with the nobility they deserve.

Placed first on the album, Op 107 dates from 1908–09, almost a decade later than the pair of Op 49 sonatas. It's an altogether more imposing challenge. Good as Janet Hilton and Jakob Fichert are on Naxos, I prefer the more dramatic approach of Collins and McHale, more keenly contrasted in dynamic as well as tempo, urging on music that does not want to sit around and navel-gaze, even as the finale gently unwinds after yet more pages of bitonal ripples and meanderings. Their clarity of intent is much aided by an excellent Chandos recording. **Peter Quantrill**

*Selected comparison:*

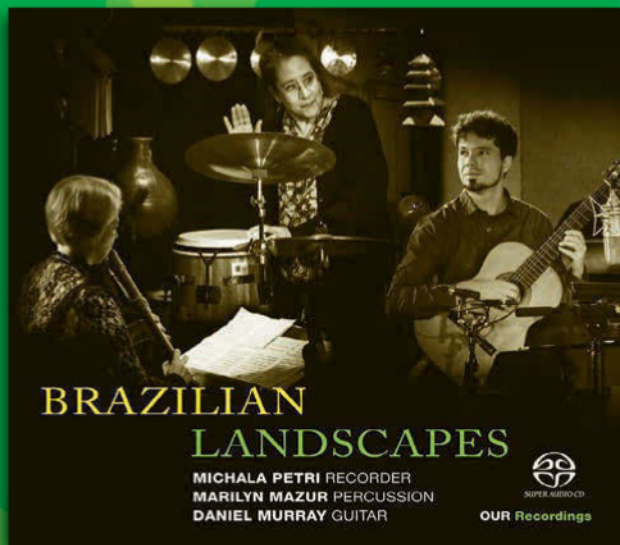
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## 'The Alehouse Sessions'

Traditional Tunes and Arrangements

The Alehouse Boys / Bjarte Eike *vn*

Rubicon © RCD1017 (51' • DDD)



There are some things you just can't fake. The chemistry of a group is one of those – the sparks of musical energy that fly when certain artists collide. Bjarte Eike's Barokksolistene is an alchemical miracle of an ensemble, a collective of virtuosos whose instinctive, playful communication and delight in one another's skill amplifies their individual performances, transforming them into pure musical gold.

In addition to their formal concerts of Baroque repertoire, Eike and his colleagues have, since 2007, developed another strand of performances. Inspired by the music-making of Commonwealth England, when theatres were closed and music forced underground into taverns, brothels and alehouses, their Alehouse Sessions create their own mongrel genre, combining 17th-century classical music with dances, sea shanties and folk songs from around the world. The players all sing, dance, tell stories and jokes, and the result are performances that have an anarchic, organic spirit all their own.

Until now Eike has kept the Alehouse Sessions strictly as live events but the project's 10th anniversary has finally generated a studio recording. Inevitably some of that concert atmosphere, the back-and-forth repartee, is gone, but instead those interactions and conversations are dissolved into the music itself. There's humour and plenty of back-chat in the muscular shanties 'Haul away Joe' and 'Pass around the grog', fleet-footed folk fiddling and irresistibly syncopated rhythms in the Travel Set and the Canadian Set – each weaving together a sequence of traditional tunes – while ballads such as the lovely 'I drew my ship' (exquisitely arranged by Eike himself for soloist Tom Guthrie and cloudy strings, bright-flecked with harmonics) give welcome moments of pause and pathos.

But perhaps most exciting are the relationships the disc establishes between Purcell's music and the nicely spoken melodies from Playford's *English Dancing Master* and their bastard musical relations in other genres. There's a wonderfully egalitarian quality to music-making that

weaves its way from court to dockyard to tavern without pause. Good music is, after all, good music, whatever its colour, creed or accent. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Avital Meets Avital'

A Avital Avi's Song. Prelude O Avital Ana

Maghrebi. Ballad for Eli. Hijazain. Lonely Girl.

Maroc. Zamzama Vilenski The Source and the

Sea (Balada al maayan ve'yam)

Avi Avital *mandolin/mandola* Omer Avital *db/oud*

Yonathan Avishai *pf* Uri Sharlin *accordion*

Itamar Doari *perc*

DG © 479 6523GH (48' • DDD)



Billed as 'classical crossover', there is nothing classical about 'Avital Meets

Avital' – unless you count the fact that Avi Avital is primarily a classical mandolinist. It's just too foot-stomping, hip-swaying, jazz and Middle Eastern fusion-saturated for such an epithet. And in case you're wondering, Avi and jazz bassist and composer Omer might share the same surname but they're not related by blood – only by a passion for the music of their Middle Eastern heritage.

Some critics have called New York-based Omer the Israeli Charles Mingus, while others – this one among them – have credited Avi with doing for the mandolin what Andrés Segovia did for the guitar. Omer has worked with the jazz pianist Yonathan Avishai before, Avi with hand percussionist Itamar Doari. As a quartet, they conjure up the intoxicating colours and textures of a street market in full swing. I'm very envious indeed of audiences who've heard them live in concert.

Omer composed most of the numbers, with Avi's improvisatory *Prelude* and *Avi's Song* (featuring Uri Sharlin on accordion) and Moshe Vilenski's stirring *The Source and the Sea* the exceptions. From the moody jazz of the opening *Zamzama* and the frenzied rhythms of *Maroc* to the soulful intensity of *Lonely Girl* and *Ballad for Eli*, the sense of delight in making music together is so palpable that even when someone breaks into a solo, as Omer does in *Ana Maghrebi*, you get the feeling they can't wait to take up the collective groove again. Utterly brilliant. **William Yeoman**

## 'Flux'

'Original Works for Saxophone Quartet'

Bozza Andante et Scherzo Gregory Hoe Down

Lago *Ciudades*. The Wordsworth Poems

Pienné Introduction et variations sur une ronde populaire Reinhart Quartet Singelée Grand quatuor concertant, Op 79

Ferio Saxophone Quartet

Chandos © CHAN10987 (81' • DDD)



I'm not sure it's possible for a saxophone quartet to be a warhorse, as such; nonetheless, I was initially mildly surprised to see that the Ferio Saxophone Quartet's first disc for Chandos didn't include Glazunov's quartet. Instead, this young British ensemble has focused on two areas of the repertoire: original 19th- and early 20th-century French music for sax quartet, and 21st-century works for the same forces. They sit surprisingly well together.

But what's immediately striking about this disc is the tonal subtlety and expressiveness of the Ferios' playing. Put aside any preconceptions about how a sax quartet sounds: from the very first item, Jean-Baptiste Singelée's *Grand quatuor* of 1862 (dedicated, delightfully, to Ambroise Thomas), you can hear the transparency of the group's tone and the range of their tonal palette, from the melting sweetness of Huw Wiggin's soprano to the dark, trenchant sound of Shevaughan Beere on baritone.

Their phrasing is buoyant and lyrical; slow, impressionistic passages such as the opening of Pienné's *Introduction et variations* and of the first of Guillermo Lago's *Wordsworth Poems* (a Ferio commission) are lucidly and atmospherically voiced. But they can turn on a ha'penny too: witness their sonic transformation from smoky melancholy in 'Sarajevo' from Lago's *Ciudades* to neon-lit urban glare in the suite's second movement, 'Tokyo'.

Lots to discover and enjoy here, then, in intensely musical performances. I was rather taken by Hugo Reinhart's F minor Quintet – composed in 2006 in an idiom that makes Mendelssohn look avant-garde, and none the worse for it. That's the nice thing about sax quartets – traditional assumptions about repertoire rarely apply. But in this case, at least, the artistry of the performances is beyond question.

**Richard Bratby**

## 'From Vienna'

Beethoven Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op 16

Berg Chamber Concerto – Adagio Mozart Trio,

'Kegelstatt', K498. Quintet for Piano and Winds,

K452 Schoenberg Chamber Symphony No 1,

Op 9 J Strauss II Kaiserwalzer, Op 437

Zemlinsky Clarinet Trio, Op 3



# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## A MOSTLY MODERN MISCELLANY

**Richard Whitehouse** delves into a pile of chamber discs on a wide range of instruments



Truly immersive: Bård Monsen and Gunnar Flagstad record 'Interactions' for 2L

His wide-ranging miscellany begins, not inappropriately, at A. **Hans Abrahamsen's** reputation was boosted recently with the critical and commercial success of his song-cycle *let me tell you*. This latest disc focuses on earlier works – the *10 Preludes* (1973) that comprise his First Quartet, in a reading less forcefully projected but no less involving than the Awards-nominated Danish Quartet (ECM, 6/16), and *Six Pieces* for horn trio (1984) that typically aligns the wistful with the subversive. Members of Ensemble MidtVest do justice to these, as also two of this composer's numerous arrangements, the languor of Satie's *Gymnopédies* and the animation of Nielsen's *Fantasy Pieces*, both emerging newly minted for oboe and strings.

Hardly wistful in his subversion, **Wojtek Blecharz** ranks among the leading younger Polish composers and *Liminal Studies* emphasises why. This DVD finds the Royal Quartet realising three of its four parts (in the order 2-1-4) in terms as much visual as aural in their visceral and assaultive gestures. The quartet-writing of Helmut Lachenmann comes to mind here, whereas *September: The Next Reading* (also 2014) recalls Mauricio Kagel in a frequently sardonic and always threatening 'scena' for voice and ensemble. Barbara Kinga Majewska is the feisty 'protagonist',

heard alongside Kwadrofonik, and this disc comes as part of the 'RSQ Directions' series promoted by the Royal Quartet in a laudable and doubtless risky venture.

Doyen of Polish composers, **Krzysztof Penderecki** is presently being covered extensively by the Dux label. Volume 2 of the chamber music collates his music for cello – opening with the bitingly satiric *Capriccio per Siegfried Palm* (1968), then taking in a transcription of the eloquent *Cadenza* for viola (1984), vivid Rostropovich portrait *Per Slava* (1986), combative test-piece *Violoncello totale* (2011), with sundry pieces and arrangements for multiple cellos. Most impressive is the Suite for solo cello (2013), its eight movements emerging over almost two decades but of a formal and expressive cohesion not always encountered in this composer. Jakob Spahn is fully equipped to handle its demands and is recorded with impressive realism.

Turning to recital discs, and the judicious programme 1943 by the flautist **Jocelyn Aubrun** with pianist Aline Piboule. Prokofiev's Sonata was an obvious inclusion, albeit seldom rendered with such poise and vitality, but this gains considerably from being heard in the context of three rarities – Marius Flothuis's elegantly neoclassical *Sonata*

*da camera*, Claude Arrieu's deftly animated *Sonatine* and Leo Smit's deceptively understated Sonata; the whole rounded off by Dutilleux's wryly amiable *Sonatine*. Playing and recording leave nothing to be desired.

Hardly less impressive is **Interactions**, selected by violinist Bård Monsen with pianist Gunnar Flagstad so that these three pieces coalesce into a cumulative overall sequence. From the late Romanticism of Fartein Valen's Violin Sonata (1922) with its flights of fancy allied to motivic rigour, through the classicist reticence and aloofness of Stravinsky's *Duo concertant* (1932), to the incisive rhetoric of Lutosławski's Partita (1984), the only drawback here is the relative short measure, but the sound – whether SACD or Blu-ray – ensures truly immersive listening.

Trumpeter Chris Gekker had more than enough pieces from which to choose for his recital and **Ghost Dialogues** accordingly reflects his jazz leanings. Framed by the wistfulness of Robert Gibson's *Fall* (2016) and soulfulness of Kevin McKee's *Song for a Friend* (2015), both with pianist Rita Sloane, the highlights are two works by Lance Hulme: the evocative title-piece (1992) with tenor saxophonist Chris Vadala and the song-sequence *The Street has Changed* (2015), in which Randall Jarrell's poetry is winsomely declaimed by mezzo Clara O'Brien.

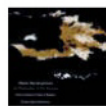
A tuba recital suggests problems of variety all its own, but Constantin Hartwig (whose prize-winning disc this is) all but overcomes these with **Klischee ade**. Arild Pilau might seem a one-work composer, yet his Concerto for tuba and strings (1990) offers undemonstrative delights aplenty, then affords pertinent context with William Kraft's teasing *Encounters II* (1964). The other four pieces are likely more involving for the player than for the listener, but Hartwig's advocacy is unstinting and his arrangements for multiple and multitracked tubas ingenious.

The highlight of this selection is a set devoted to the string quartets of **Diego Conti**. Now in his late fifties, Conti has been active as violinist and conductor before focusing overtly on composition. A pity that the booklet note has so little to say about the actual music, all written during 2007-12 – of which the earlier three quartets, each in three relatively brief

movements, evoke the polystylism of Alfred Schnittke and, before this, the confrontation between idioms of George Rochberg. This latter is more to the fore in the stark contrasts of the five-movement Fifth Quartet; either side of which its companions unfold continuously though with an underlying disjunction as intriguing as it is provocative. Played with conviction by the members of Officina Musicale, this survey warrants the attention of inquisitive listeners everywhere and it will be fascinating to hear in what direction Conti's music goes henceforth.

Finally, a brief detour to the 19th century and the cello music of **Sebastian Lee**. Cellists will doubtless have ploughed through his pedagogical output with mixed feelings, though the *40 Easy Etudes* (1855) evince a surprising variety (thanks in part to accompaniment from a second cello) for all their brevity, while the *40 Melodious and Progressive Studies* (c1845) afford a Czerny-like compendiousness of cello technique. Martin Rummel (in collaboration with Sebastian Hartung) ensures that they provide diverting and not unrewarding listening. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



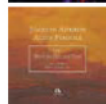
**Abrahamsen** 10 Preludes, Six Pieces  
Ensemble MidtVest  
Dacapo **Ⓢ** 8 226091



**Blecharz** Liminal Studies, September  
Royal Quartet et al  
Dux Bôlt **Ⓢ** DUX8330



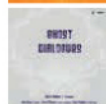
**Penderecki** Chamber Works, Vol 2  
Jakob Spahn et al  
Dux **Ⓢ** DUX1244



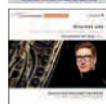
**Various Cpsrs** Wks for Fl & Pf  
Jocelyn Aubrun, Aline Piboule  
Artalinna **Ⓢ** ATLA013



**Various Cpsrs** 'Interactions'  
Bård Monsen, Gunnar Flagstad  
2L **Ⓢ** ② (Ⓢ + Ⓢ) 2L137SABD



**Various Cpsrs** 'Ghost Dialogues'  
Chris Gekker et al  
Métier **Ⓢ** MSV28572



**Various Cpsrs** Klischee ade  
Constantin Hartwig  
Genuin **Ⓢ** GEN17471



**Conti** String Quartets Nos 1-6  
Officina Musicale  
Tactus **Ⓢ** ② TC950390



**Lee** Cello Études, Opp 31 & 70  
Martin Rummel, Sebastian Hartung  
Paladino **Ⓢ** ② PMR0083

### London Conchord Ensemble

Champs Hill **Ⓢ** ② CHRCD115 (147' • DDD)



This is a generously filled set, and at first glance the idea is appealing – a disc of chamber music for mixed ensembles from the Second Viennese School coupled with a separate disc containing three masterpieces from what one might call the First. In fact, the gap between these two discs isn't just historical and it's tempting to wonder whether Champs Hill originally intended to release them together. The Mozart and Beethoven pieces were recorded in 2012 and 2013, while the later works were laid down in 2015, though the venue (Champs Hill Music Room) and the performers are common to both.

Good news first: the second disc is a thoughtfully devised programme, performed with considerable conviction and style. The chamber-scale acoustic serves it well; and moments such as the fiendishly complex scherzo-like central section of the Schoenberg (recorded here in Webern's elegant five-player reduction) come through with clarity and verve. In fact everything here has an unmistakable sense of forward movement, which means that the slower passages of the Berg and Schoenberg, while certainly atmospheric, never lose the sense of tension necessary in these big single-movement structures.

The real gem, though, is the Zemlinsky, a lovely showcase for the plangent cello tone of Thomas Carroll and Maximiliano Martín's deep, chocolatey clarinet sound, ideally poised between Brahmsian lyricism, gypsy firelight and *fin de siècle* angst. A fresh, witty account of the *Emperor Waltz* finds a real sense of delight in Schoenberg's sometimes startling rescoring.

I wish I could be as positive about the first disc, in which that energy becomes relentless and the playing occasionally lacks finesse. These performances have their moments – the double-act of Andrea De Flammeneis on bassoon and Nicholas Korth's horn in K452 is particularly engaging – but overall these are big, brash concert-hall interpretations that never fully relax, marred by the garishly bright upper register of Robin Milford's piano. That's just about passable in a work as extrovert as the Beethoven, but Mozart's Quintet begs for more tenderness, and the *Kegestatt* Trio –

domestic music at its most intimate – absolutely demands it. A set of two halves, then: take your pick.

Richard Bratby

## 'Suites & Fantasies'

**Britten Suite**, Op 6 **Falla Suite** popular española  
**Frolov** Concert Fantasy on Themes from Porgy and Bess **Milhaud** Le boeuf sur le toit, Op 58b  
**Schnittke Suite in the Old Style**

Joo Yeon Sir *vn* Irina Andrievsky *pf*  
Rubicon **Ⓢ** RCD1003 (78' • DDD)



You won't find any biographical information about Joo Yeon Sir in

Rubicon's basic booklet: you are kindly referred to her website. The Korean-born British violinist won the Grand Prix Laureate at the Nedyalka Simeonova International Violin Competition in Bulgaria at the age of 16, and last year she was awarded a young artist residency at St John's Smith Square, where this album of 20th-century suites and fantasies was recorded.

Joo Yeon Sir has a light, delicate tone, which suits Alfred Schnittke's *Suite in the Old Style* with its Stravinskian neoclassical politeness. She turns phrases elegantly, ably supported by Irina Andrievsky's stylish piano accompaniments. Michael Kennedy viewed Britten's Suite for violin and piano as the last of his 'prentice instrumental works'. It charts a course between charm and abrasiveness and is given a committed reading here.

It's in the more extrovert numbers where Joo Yeon Sir falls slightly short. She pulls rubato around nicely in Manuel de Falla's *Suite popular española* but doesn't really put her stamp on fiery dances like the 'Polo'. The *cinéma-fantaisie* version for violin and piano of Darius Milhaud's sassy *Le boeuf sur le toit* needs a lot more tongue-in-cheek teasing and sheer vivacity to pull it off. Igor Alexandrovich Frolov's fantasy on themes from *Porgy and Bess* makes a pleasant, foot-tapping conclusion to the disc, though, with a dreamy 'Summertime', and Joo Yeon Sir finally lets her hair down in 'It ain't necessarily so'.

Mark Pullinger

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# Ruggiero Ricci

Tully Potter considers the long and varied career of the Italian-American violinist who made playing Paganini and unaccompanied recitals, both live and on record, his calling card

Many famous violinists came and went during Ruggiero Ricci's 85-year career, from 1928 to 2003. For most of that time, and especially in the three decades after World War II, he was in the top echelon of soloists, with a reputation for playing Paganini and other virtuoso fare. Short of stature, he dominated the concert platform with the assurance and seeming permanence of a miniature oak. With nothing more than his violin and bow, he could keep an audience enthralled for an hour or more.

For such a confident performer, he had a stressful start in life, and it is doubtful that he was well taught – he confided to me that playing the violin had virtually deformed him. Born to Italian immigrant parents on Presidio army base, San Francisco, on July 24, 1918, he was named Woodrow Wilson Rich by an army doctor but christened Roger Alexis Rich. His six siblings were all musical; the piano was Roger's first love but his father, a trombonist and bandmaster, insisted on his becoming a fiddler. At eight he went to Louis Persinger, whose assistant Beth Lackey took him and cellist brother George to New York, overseeing his five hours of daily practice.

She gave the boys the professional names Ruggiero and Giorgio Ricci (their father's real surname). On November 15, 1928, Ruggiero made his recital debut in San Francisco, billed as eight years old and playing Vieuxtemps, Saint-Saëns, Mendelssohn and Wieniawski. From 1929 he appeared in New York with great success. His parents had been suing Lackey for control of the boys' careers and late in 1930, after 41 court hearings, the family was reunited.

An unsettled period ensued: abortive lessons with Mishel Piastro, a tour of Europe, more studies with Georg Kulenkampff in Germany and the Auer disciple Paul Stassevich in Norway and

America, then a return to Persinger. At 16 he nearly gave up the violin for the piano. 'Then one day I came across a pile of old newspaper cuttings and I realised how really good I had been just five years earlier.' He regained his form through a note-by-note analysis of Paganini's Caprices and in 1938 made his first 78rpm discs in Berlin.

World War II matured him. 'Entertainment Specialist Ricci' was one of five leaders of a crack US Army Air Force orchestra in uniform, with a party trick of playing Paganini's *Moto perpetuo* backwards. He booked Town Hall, New York, on

November 21, 1946, for an unaccompanied recital: Stamitz-Kreisler, Bach, Ysaÿe, Hindemith, Kreisler, Wieniawski and Paganini. Mischa Elman said he was crazy, but he triumphed. Thereafter he repeated the pattern worldwide.

Ricci premiered Ginastera's Concerto in 1963 and von Einem's Concerto in 1970. He introduced Paganini's Fourth and Sixth Concertos to America, as well as music by Prokofiev, Goehr, Rodrigo, Lees, Pizzetti, Flury, Arnold, Jaques-Dalcroze, Schurmann and Zimmermann. He could play 30 or 40 of his 50 concertos at short notice, and he

unearthed pieces by Joseph White, Ole Bull, Louis Spohr and Heinrich Ernst. After more than 6000 appearances in 65 countries, he gave his last public performances in 2003. He taught at Indiana University, the Juilliard School, the University of Michigan and the Salzburg Mozarteum. At various times he was based in Europe or America and latterly in Palm Springs, California: he died at home on August 6, 2012. He played hundreds of costly violins by Stradivari, the Guarneri family and other classic Italian luthiers (even Paganini's 'Cannon' Guarneri) after borrowing a Strad in 1929. His main instrument was always a Guarneri del Gesù, first the 'Camposelice' and from 1957 the 'Gibson'.

*The characteristic resinous tone, intense vibrato and slightly abrasive bow attack were most vividly captured by Decca*

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### • 1929 – *New York debut*

On October 20, 11-year-old Ricci plays the Mendelssohn Concerto at Mecca Auditorium, New York, receiving rapturous notices. He also gives a Carnegie Hall recital and in 1930 he returns for the Beethoven Concerto.

### • 1932 – *The prodigy years*

During a Europe tour he performs the Mendelssohn Concerto at Queen's Hall with the LSO under Sir Hamilton Harty, adding Ries's *Perpetuum mobile*, Sarasate's *Zapateado* and a Bach encore.

### • 1942–45 – *World War II and going solo*

Playing in the US Army Air Force Western Command orchestra, he has many opportunities to perform concertos and gives numerous recitals, often without a pianist, for the troops.

### • 1950 – *Recording Paganini's oeuvre*

Ricci records Paganini's 24 solo Caprices for American Decca – the first complete version without piano. The recordings also appear on English Decca and in 1959 he remakes the Caprices for the label.

### • 1957–58 – *Tours around the world*

Goes on a long world tour. He first visits Japan in 1960 and eventually he tours the Soviet Union three times – beginning in 1961 – and appears in just about every corner of the globe.



He liked to get a lot of bow hair on the string, which could result in some 'crunch', but nothing was faked or skimped. His staccato and spiccato were exemplary. He played much Sarasate and most of Paganini's oeuvre. More than 500 recordings included two cycles of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas and six of the 24 Paganini Caprices, one on video. His Brahms Concerto came with a choice of 16 cadenzas, and his album *The Glory of Cremona* featured 15 different violins. The characteristic resinous Ricci tone, intense vibrato and slightly abrasive bow attack were most vividly captured in a long series for Decca, often engineered by Kenneth Wilkinson. In later

years Ricci liked to record a piece or movement in one take, so he both began and ended his studio career with unedited performances. The technical side fascinated him and some of his records were made at home – one, Prokofiev's D major Sonata with Carlo Bussotti, is in the outstanding Decca

Eloquence set recommended here, otherwise devoted to splendid solo interpretations.

Ricci will always be remembered as a great Romantic violinist who managed to straddle two eras, bringing 20th-century rigour to the virtuoso music of the 19th century but also exploring some of the best of the modern age. **G**

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Stravinsky & Prokofiev**  
Ruggiero Ricci *vn*  
Decca Eloquence



# Instrumental



Patrick Rucker is absorbed by Noriko Ogawa's latest Satie:

*'Ogawa is aided by her beautiful Érard, its vividly distinct registers expertly captured by the BIS engineers'* ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 80](#)



Jeremy Nicholas on a wide-ranging programme from Luiza Borac:

*'Schumann's Concerto is a joy from beginning to end, tender and exuberant in equal measure'* ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 84](#)

## Beethoven · Prokofiev · Schumann

**Beethoven** Six Bagatelles, Op 126

**Prokofiev** Sarcasms, Op 17

**Schumann** Davidsbündlertänze, Op 6

**Nikita Mndoyants** *pf*

Steinway & Sons © STNS30075 (65' • DDD)



Winner of the 2016 Cleveland and 2007 Paderewski Competitions, as

well as a finalist in the 2013 Cliburn, the Russian pianist Nikita Mndoyants would seem to be well on his way to an international career. He is also an accomplished composer who, at the age of 27, teaches orchestration at the Moscow Conservatory. His new release on the Steinway label shows him to be an excellent pianist as well as a wise and thoughtful musician.

Beethoven's Op 126 Bagatelles seem not so much interpreted as realised. Each small-scale structure is delivered intact, their straightforward expressive gestures immaculately tailored. Individually and as a set, it is as though we are overhearing an improvisation.

Despite the communicative urgency maintained throughout the *Davidsbündlertänze*, they unfold with an air of un rushed inevitability. Schumann's wit and mercurial playfulness, whether manifest in rhythmic emphases, melodic contours or voice-leading, are relished without ostentation. Pensiveness and longing are sensitively portrayed with a chaste rubato, coupled with abstemious pedalling. For all its earnestness, Mndoyants's reading is refreshingly unaffected, bracingly masculine, spontaneous and willing on occasion to speak ardently of love.

*Sarcasms* fairly bursts with rhythmic vitality, punctuated with oases of wanton languor or stubborn insistence. Prokofiev's bristling, in-your-face impudence is aptly captured, but in a surprising way:

Mndoyants draws from his stylistic arsenal resources of touch and dynamic variety held in reserve in his Beethoven and Schumann. As he nonchalantly peels Prokofiev's hard-boiled egg, we're treated to flavours and textures within that are often overlooked.

One risk of programmes consisting entirely of miniatures is that they can leave listeners feeling stunted, desiring the more extended involvement of a variation set or sonata. Happily, Mndoyants is able to achieve a genuine balance of form and content, his interpretations informed, one feels, by his composer's ear. His carefully wrought miniatures combine the clarity and immediacy of a snapshot with an aphoristic succinctness. The result is an appealing musical experience that both nourishes and satisfies. **Patrick Rucker**

## Brahms · Dvořák · Grieg

*'Music for Piano Four Hands'*

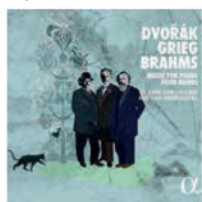
**Brahms** Hungarian Dances, WoO1 Nos 11-21

**Dvořák** Slavonic Dances, Op 46 B78

**Grieg** Norwegian Dances, Op 35

**Claire Chevallier, Jos Van Immerseel** *pf*

Alpha © ALPHA282 (71' • DDD)



These are two distinguished artists so I hesitate to say it, but this recording

made me extremely grumpy. For a number of reasons. First, the piano used for this programme of 22 duets is a straight-strung 1870 Bechstein grand chosen, so Immerseel tells us in the booklet, because such instruments 'usually sound much more transparent and noticeably clearer in the bass than their (modern) over-strung equivalents'. Certainly, it is nearly always interesting from a historical perspective to hear music performed on a contemporary instrument, but I simply don't like the sound of this particular Bechstein with its penetrating, insistent treble and mumbling, indistinct bass, both of which seem unevenly voiced right through the register.

Secondly, the duo play Nos 11 to 21 (books 3 and 4 from 1880, not so identified on the cover) of Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*. There were numerous examples in the 1960s of pop groups having enjoyed a number one hit and then being asked by their record companies to cash in with a follow-up in the same vein. The successor was never as good and was quickly forgotten. These Dances are Brahms's equivalent. The collection is not on the same level as Nos 1 to 10 (books 1 and 2 from 1869), often repeating and relying on the same gestures and figurations. I am not saying books 3 and 4 should never be played because they are inferior to the earlier set, but they should certainly be cherry-picked – and the customer informed.

Then there's the second of the three Grieg Dances. Where is the lilting charm of this innocent little piece? Why so gruff in the central section? And why are the *Slavonic Dances* so heavy-handed and joyless? Listening to the treble jabs in 'Sousedská' (No 4 in F major), one longs for it to end. And as for the famous 'Furiant' (No 8 in G minor), it is marked *presto*, not a leisurely *moderato*. Finally, why is there a picture of Janáček on the cover?

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## Chopin

*Études* – Op 10; Op 25

**Amir Katz** *pf*

Orfeo © C922 171A (53' • DDD)



Setting off on Op 10, you get the impression that Amir Katz is a man in a hurry, dragging Chopin's *Études* out of the concert hall and back into the practice room. For all the pictorial nicknames that they may have acquired over the years, in his readings that aspect becomes less important than surmounting their formidable technical challenges. That is the first impression, not helped by an Op 10 No 3 in which speed replaces songfulness –



A world unlike any other: Marc-André Hamelin turns his attention to Morton Feldman – see review on page 78

in stark contrast to Perahia – while the grinding angst of the E flat minor (No 6) is lost at his *allegretto* tempo; just hear what Freire, at a more dignified pace, does with this. That said, Katz does draw its melody out to good effect, while No 8 has some richly coloured quiet playing and every note of its filigree is audible. In No 10 something seems to shift, for Katz allows himself more time to breathe, to compelling effect. The remaining two études are also more spacious than some, the articulation of No 12 rendered with impressive clarity.

To my mind, his reading of Op 25 as a whole is more involving, perfectly balancing the murmuring harp-like accompaniment and Chopin's ineffably beautiful melody in the first of the set. If I like my F major (No 3) with a touch more wit – as witness Perahia – No 7 in C sharp minor has real pathos and depth. The G flat major (No 9) is affectionate, if less elfin than Freire's, and this stands in great contrast with the turbulent octaves of the following Étude in B minor, into which Katz launches with great power, enjoying the contrast with Chopin's more inner writing. He continues in this virtuoso vein with a chilling 'Winter Wind' and closes the disc with a fervently virtuoso account of the C minor Étude.

If ultimately Katz doesn't alter the status quo in terms of benchmark recordings, there are some fine things on offer here.

**Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Perahia* (11/02) (SONY) SK61885


*Freire* (8/02, A/05<sup>th</sup>) (DECC) 470 288-2DH,

478 2181DH (oas)

## Chopin

**Complete Mazurkas**

**Joanna MacGregor** *pf*

Sound Circus  ② SCCD21705 (137' • DDD)



Joanna MacGregor is a pianist who never fails to surprise, and the complete Chopin mazurkas has become a recital favourite of late. Chopin? Yes, I did a bit of a double-take too, for he's not a composer I would naturally associate with MacGregor, an artist who excels above all in music that is rhythmically led. Colour is not, I would say, her strong point.

So I approached this two-CD set with a sense of intrigued interest; it is designed to take the listener on a journey from early to late Chopin, in the process splitting

Opp 67 and 68. She writes her own notes, which are wide-ranging in their references, and her playing very much bears out her thoughts – so, for instance, in the final mazurka of Op 50 she makes us more than usually aware of its Bachian counterpoint and the harmonic daring of its coda.

Sometimes I found her too dry in effect, in a mazurka such as Op 41 No 2 or the drone-suffused sections of Op 56 No 2. And I did wonder what you'd make of the A minor, KK IIb No 4, if you'd never previously encountered it – MacGregor sounds dangerously meandering here.

Elegance is not a MacGregor trademark either, and where Chopin calls for it (admittedly it's a rarer beast here in the mazurkas than in most of his other genre pieces) she looks for other solutions. The A flat major, Op 50 No 2, for instance, which in Rubinstein's hands has all the time in the world, here darts around nervously, its D flat major inner section finding none of the delicious contrast of Rubinstein. In the earliest mazurkas this can also be a bit of an issue, for MacGregor seems ill at ease with their simplicity (sample tracks 1 and 3 on the first disc). And if comparing her with Rubinstein seems an odd choice, I do it on account



of their both being strong musical personalities, even if they are at different ends of the interpretative scale.

MacGregor is most compelling where Chopin is at his most experimental: the second of the Op 63 Mazurkas, for instance, with its dissonant opening, or the third, for that matter, with its generous helping of what she describes as 'klezmer music ... ironic and wonderfully cultured'. Among the earlier ones, she enjoys the skittering adventurousness of Op 17 No 3, while the five that make up Op 7 form a vibrant study in contrasts.

For mazurkas with a difference, give these a try. But I'm not entirely convinced that MacGregor is a natural when it comes to Chopin. **Harriet Smith**

*Selected comparison:*

Rubinstein (RCA) GD60822

## Feldman

For Bunita Marcus

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68048 (73' • DDD)



Suggesting that Morton Feldman CDs ought to be 'listened to at a much lower

level than usual' is foolhardy. Feldman marks the first bar of his solo piano piece *For Bunita Marcus* (1985) *ppp* and the next 75 minutes ostensibly roll forwards without any further tweaks of dynamic. In reality, though, the melodic contours – especially a recurring motif that tickles the spacious music surrounding it with a flurry of fast notes crushed into a bar of 1/8 – implies inbuilt hairpins and drop-offs. The pianist has been set an exercise in self-control. No matter what the expressive swells might be implying, restraint must be your watchword. Feldman is pitching his material against the natural grain of the piano but also of our expectations; *ppp* turns out to be a conceptual dynamic marking. And to hear this rubbing-your-stomach-while-scratching-your-head nest of paradoxes play out over the long haul I'd recommend that you resist turning down the quiet.

Seasoned Feldmanistas such as John Tilbury, Hildegard KleeB and Sabine Liebner – each with a *For Bunita Marcus* recording to their names – would never try to prejudice your listening preferences, but Marc-André Hamelin is a new kid on the block when it comes to recording Feldman and we must forgive his greenness. Clearly he is in awe of what this music tells him about the piano that he doesn't already

know: 'you are about to enter a world unlike any other', his booklet note states, the point being that Feldman's knack of building enormous and discursive structures out of tiny note cells – often memorable, like tiny corners of nursery-rhymes – forces you to reconsider how music moves over time. Opting for a safe and secure tempo that obeys Feldman's crotchet=63-66 faithfully allows Hamelin to embed discreet momentum into the performance; Tilbury allows himself more breathing space, while Liebner's daring, crawling tempo essentially restructures the work's internal dimensions (88 minutes against Hamelin's 72'38").

Ivan Ilić's recent recording for the Paraty label leans towards a consciously warmed tone, an approach which Hamelin questions in his intelligently argued, pianistically adroit performance. Those mirage-like canons, where the music accrues rhythmic impetus near the beginning, glide like Russian ballerinas – at same time as Hamelin centres each note with a well-aimed, delicately resonant peck. His consistency throughout of tempo and touch tells of urgent dispatch, and yet the rather icy surface of Liebner's recording, which nudges the sound-fabric too close to Webern, is not part of Hamelin's more nuanced vision. **Philip Clark**

*Selected comparisons:*

Liebner (3/08) (OEHM) OC594

Ilić (12/15) (PARA) PARATY135305

KleeB (HATN) HATNOWART174

Tilbury (LONH) DOCU4

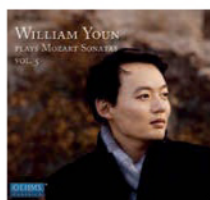
## Mozart

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 5'

Piano Sonatas – No 6, K284; No 7, K309; No 14, K457. Fantasy, K475

William Youn *pf*

Oehms Ⓢ OC1857 (77' • DDD)



I much enjoyed William Youn's previous volume of Mozart (1/17) and

this latest disc by the Korean-born, Munich-based pianist is every bit as fine. Here we have playing that is absolutely at the service of the composer yet also full of personality. He is fully alive to the contrasts in the opening *Allegro* of the D major Sonata, K284 – now in mock-military mode, now seamless legato, the trills so sharp they could cut you. The simplicity with which the second-movement 'Rondeau en polonaise' unfolds is again a tribute to Youn's innate musicality, even if Uchida is more rapt still. But the main event of this

sonata is the extended variation-form finale. Youn is alive to its sheer variety, from the tiptoeing entry of Var 5 to the manic energy in the hand-crossing Var 6, which is brought to a halt by the most touching shift to the minor (Var 7). The dreamy penultimate variation is also intensely moving in Youn's hands, giving way to a playfully triumphant Var 12.

The C major Sonata, K309, is just as compelling, Youn relishing the tension between extrovert and introvert in the first movement, the octaves never sounding out of scale, despite the modern instrument. After the shy elegance of the *Andante un poco adagio*, Youn palpably enjoys the playful finale, its hunt-like motifs given with wit but never over-egged.

He chooses to preface the C minor Sonata, K457, with the Fantasy, K475, as Haefliger does on his disc. Youn's reading of the Fantasy is one of the highlights here: he is fully alive to the importance of the silences within it, while also letting the music build and billow without ever lapsing into melodrama. And the sudden outburst of toccata-like writing (at 7'59") is thrilling indeed. In the Sonata, the bald outlines of its opening are judged to a nicety – dramatic but not hectoring – though I very much like Brendel here in his recording from 2000, where he internalises the movement's *Sturm und Drang* to profound effect. Haefliger sets off at a lightning tempo, perhaps slightly too fast for the drama to tell sufficiently, though the elfin high-lying writing is undeniably effective. Youn manages to sound entirely natural in the slow movement – no mean feat, as anyone who has ever attempted it will know – while Mozart's endless changes of direction in the finale are conveyed with great panache.

This is beguiling Mozart-playing – innate, intelligent, honest and fiercely musical. **Harriet Smith**

*Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:*

Uchida (PHIL) 468 356-2PB5

K457 – selected comparison:

Brendel (1/02) (PHIL) 468 048-2PH

K475 & 457 – selected comparison:

Haefliger (SONY) SK46748

## Rzewski

The People United Will Never Be Defeated!

Daan Vandewalle *pf*

Etcetera Ⓢ KTC1589 (61' • DDD)



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he has a natural inclination towards big projects such as performing Alvin Curran's complete *Inner Cities* piano cycle in one concert, or tackling Sorabji's four and a half-hour-plus *Opus clavicembalisticum*. So it comes as no surprise that Frederic Rzewski's monumental variation set based on Sergio Ortega's resistance song 'The People United Will Never Be Defeated!' provides a fitting showcase for Vandewalle's gifts.

He gets off to a tentative start in the opening theme, at a tempo slower and less rock steady than in Rzewski's 1986 HatArt recording. If his lilting and yielding rubato in Variation 1 sounds slightly arch, closer scrutiny reveals the pianist going out of his way to project Rzewski's myriad phrase groupings and articulations, while providing a contrasting point of reference to Var 2's resolute firmness. Similarly, a more expansive and lyrical Var 3 than usual offsets Var 4's forward drive. As the performance progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Vandewalle is striving to give each variation its own character and point of view.

Numerous other details fascinate. In contrast to Igor Levit's suave and sweeping Var 8, Vandewalle takes time to probe the intricate voice-leading, in the manner of both Rzewski and the work's dedicatee, Ursula Oppens. To my ears, Vandewalle's brisk, slightly clipped reading of Var 15 misses the music's ruminative improvisatory point, while unusual tempo adjustments arguably undermine the relentless virtuoso drive in Vars 20–23: here Levit, Marc-André Hamelin and Christopher Hinterhuber truly strut their stuff! If Vandewalle is a tad heavy in Var 26's fierce march, his patient pacing and spontaneous nuance over the course of Var 27's lengthy minimalist patterns compensates. He also takes brilliant advantage of Rzewski's improvised cadenza option, going between sparse bitonality and Lisztian bravura.

While Oppens's Cedille remake remains the sonic and interpretative version of reference, Vandewalle broaches Rzewski's aesthetic with a strong personality and often sheds fresh light on various aspects of this vast score, whether or not one agrees with all his ideas. As such, this recording warrants attention in an increasingly crowded and competitive field. **Jed Distler**

*Selected comparisons:*

Hamelin (7/99) (HYPE) CDA67077

Levit (11/15) (SONY) 88875 06096-2

Oppens (1/16) (CEDI) CDR90000 158

Hinterhuber (PALA) PMR0037

Rzewski (NONE) ➔ 7559 79623-2

## Satie

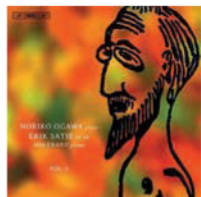
'Piano Works, Vol 2'

Enfantillages pittoresques. Menus propos enfantins. Trois Nouvelles enfantines.

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Noriko Ogawa *pf*

BIS (P) BIS2225 (75) • DDD/DSD



If Erik Satie was championed by Debussy and Cocteau during his lifetime,

popular fascination with this French iconoclast can credibly be dated to the 1960s, with François Lesure's exhibition at the Bibliothèque Nationale, the concerts of John Cage and the recordings of Aldo Ciccolini. Last year, when the perspicaciously prolific Noriko Ogawa marked the 150th anniversary of Satie's birth by embarking on a survey of his piano music, playing an 1890 Érard, the response was appropriately enthusiastic. Her second instalment in the series warrants an equally warm reception.

In a programme spanning Satie's creative career, the largest piece of real estate is devoted to *Sports et divertissements*, 21 miniatures that, when played as a series, amount to about 13½ minutes. Imbuing these tiny musical statements, several of which last less than 30 seconds, with the character suggested in titles such as 'Fishing', 'Bathing in the Sea', 'Yachting', 'Golf', 'The Picnic', 'The Tango', 'Flirtation', 'Fireworks' and 'Tennis' is no mean feat. Ogawa succeeds admirably, aided and abetted at every turn by her beautiful, straight-strung Érard, its vividly distinct registers expertly captured by the BIS engineers.

Earliest of the pieces presented here are the Three Sarabandes, the second of which is dedicated to Ravel. It is startling to realise that Satie conceived them in 1887, anticipating the Baroque dance evocations of Saint-Saëns and well before the archaising suites of Ravel and Debussy. Ogawa unveils a distinctively restrained yet aptly exalted tone for the suites written in response to Satie's various spiritual perambulations, *Sonneries de la Rose+Croix* and *Trois Préludes du Fils des étoiles*.

Appreciation of Debussy and Ravel's stature need not be diminished by exploring the number of trends in their work anticipated by Satie. Instead,

experiencing Satie's prescient charms and occasional impudence, particularly with a guide as sympathetic as Ogawa, lends context and nuance to our understanding of those whom he demonstrably influenced.

**Patrick Rucker**

## Schumann

Carnaval, Op 9. Faschingsschwank aus

Wien, Op 26. Theme and Variations,

'Geistervariationen', WoO24

Juan Carlos *pf*

Odradek (P) ODRCD342 (69) • DDD



Studio Odradek is an audibly small, acoustically controlled space where the

instrument is a (2008) Steinway Model B. To some extent, the restricted but not unattractive resulting sound reflects the character of Juan Carlos's concept. Everything is transparent, neatly executed with a dynamic spectrum of *f* to *p*, in tidy performances that rarely stray beyond the confines of the studio.

Nevertheless, Carlos's *Carnaval* has some interesting individual touches. For instance, he includes 'Sphinx', those three strange bars, different permutations of the A-S-C-H theme that occurs throughout the work, inserted between No 8, 'Réplique', and No 9, 'Papillons'. Most pianists omit them. Carlos copies Rachmaninov's solution (*r*1929) of a sinister sustained bass tremolo and prefacing the third section with an added A natural. In No 15, 'Pantalon et Colombine', he highlights the right hand's quaver G and crotchet F in the second bar (which is what Schumann's notation indicates) instead of following, as is generally favoured, the downwards trajectory of staccato semiquavers as the leading voice. However, he gives us the conventional view of 'Chopin' (No 12), poetic and lyrical, of course, but not *agitato* or *forte* as marked (turn to Hamelin – Hyperion, 1/06 – for this).

The coupling is apt. Schumann's original title for *Carnaval* was *Fasching: Schwünke auf vier Noten* ('Carnival: Jests on Four Notes'); *Faschingsschwank aus Wien*, composed four years later (1839), is another carnival with those magical four letters ASCH. The same emotional and tonal constraints pertain but listening to Michelangeli's live performance (1957, Royal Festival Hall – Testament, 12/96) reveals how much more there is to this wonderful score, and how much it benefits from the imagination of a greater artist and the singing tone of a full-size grand – especially in the Intermezzo,



Finbarr O'Dempsey, Freya Waley-Cohen and Tamsin Waley-Cohen listen to early sketches for *Permutations* in Aldeburgh's Jerwood Kiln Studio

surely one of the composer's most impassioned utterances, to say nothing of the skyrocketing finale.

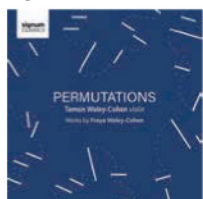
Carlos concludes his programme with the *Geistervariationen*, a work that might seem out of place with what has gone before but which the pianist feels depicts 'an ethereal, ghostly carnival from within, probing different facets of a single character'. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## F Waley-Cohen

*Permutations*. Unveil

**Tamsin Waley-Cohen** *vn*

Signum © SIGCD496 (28' • DDD)



Tamsin Waley-Cohen has built up a wide-ranging discography for Signum and now turns to the music of her sister Freya (b1989), whose increasingly varied catalogue here extends to a site-specific project. *Permutations* is the outcome of a collaboration between composer and violinist, along with designers Andrew Skulina and Finbarr O'Dempsey, for a work situated within a partitioned environment. Created over three years, Aldeburgh Music's Jerwood Kiln Studio

consists of six individual chambers, with each of the score's pre-recorded violin parts housed in an acoustically variable setting. There are numerous antecedents (notably Nono's *La lontananza nostalgica utopica futura*), but Waley-Cohen's work is notable for its economy of material – the (palindromic) series of intervals in the subject of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* the basis for what has been refashioned on this disc as a continuous sequence; those separate violin parts integrated into a 'fantasy' tracing an eventful course towards its decisive outcome.

It's an imaginative and absorbing piece, rendered here with great finesse. It might perhaps have been worthwhile to include a DVD component featuring the installation as it was seen at this year's Aldeburgh Festival, but the composer has described this at length in her booklet note (while a visual diary of its evolution can be accessed at [permutations.co](http://permutations.co)).

Also included is *Unveil*, a study in which material improvised when realising the larger work has been recast as successive variations that the soloist unfolds prior to revealing the original melody. Deftly executed, it makes an imaginative pendant to a fascinating overall concept.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Widor

Bach's *Memento*<sup>a</sup>. Conte d'Avril – No 6, Marche nuptial<sup>b</sup>. Marche americaine<sup>b</sup>. Trois Nouvelles pièces, Op 87<sup>a</sup>. Suite Latine<sup>a</sup>

**Joseph Nolan** *org*

Signum © 2 SICGD438 (83' • DDD)

Played on the Cavaillé-Coll organs of <sup>b</sup>St François de Sales, Lyon, and <sup>a</sup>Saint-Sernin, Toulouse



As a postscript to his recordings of the complete symphonies, Joseph Nolan has

mopped up the last crumbs of Widor's solo organ output for these two discs. He actually goes further. In addition to the three works all written after the symphonies and recorded here on the famous Cavaillé-Coll of Saint-Sernin, Toulouse, he includes two transcriptions recorded on the Cavaillé-Coll of St François de Sales, Lyon.

It is tempting to regard Widor's solo organ works as afterthoughts for the symphonies. Yet the six movements of *Suite Latine* possesses a clear sense of coherence. Three of them make use of Gregorian chants, but unity is created more by a clear progression from the introverted





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Joseph Nolan adds a postscript to his Signum recordings of Widor's complete symphonies

'Praeludium' to the extrovert 'Lauda Sion' and by music which is less concerned with organ colour than 'spiritualised sentiment', to quote Marcel Dupré. There is an abundance of trills – especially in the fourth movement ('Ave maris stella') – which Joseph Nolan delicately executes but which too often find themselves competing against uncomfortably prominent action noise.

Widor's very last organ work was the *Nouvelles pièces* of 1934. A mood of tranquillity permeates all three pieces, not least the concluding 'Classique d'aujourd'hui' (sadly misspelled in the booklet) in which Nolan deflects any tendency for virtuoso display in its toccata-like figurations by using the organ's delightfully delicate flutes.

Bach's *Memento* is a suite of six pieces which have their origins in Bach, but travel so far beyond that even the booklet's description of them as 'paraphrase-transcriptions' seems wide of the mark. Widor himself suggested they were 'orchestrations'. However, his own distinct voice, as well as the unique qualities of Cavaillé-Coll, largely obscures the hand of Bach. The fourth movement – 'Marche du veilleur de nuit' – starts off like 'Wachet auf' but quickly wanders so far off course that Bach seems a lingering memory. It

ends with a stirring movement derived from the *St Matthew Passion*.

We enter an entirely different world, both musically and sonically, with the two transcriptions. The boisterous *Marche américaine*, transcribed by Dupré from one of Widor's piano pieces, has one foot in the fairground and another on the parade ground, while *Marche nuptiale* is a transcription by Widor himself of some incidental music to a stage play. Nolan delivers both with tremendous ebullience, making a gloriously upbeat conclusion to this superb Widor series. **Marc Rochester**

## Leff Pouishnoff

'The Complete 78rpm and Selected Saga LP Recordings'

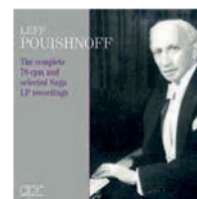
**Albéniz/Godowsky** Tango, Op 165 No 2  
**JS Bach/Saint-Saëns** Cantata No 29 – Overture  
**Beethoven/Saint-Saëns** The Ruins of Athens – Chorus of Dervishes **Chopin** Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57. Études: Op 10 – No 4; Op 25 – No 1; No 2; No 9. Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op 66. Mazurka No 21, Op 30 No 4. Nocturnes – No 2, Op 9 No 2; No 9, Op 32 No 1. Waltz No 2, Op 34  
**No 1 Debussy** Arabesque No 2 **Glazunov** Polka, Op 42 No 2 (two recordings). Theme and Variations, Op 72 **Grainger** Shepherd's Hey **Liszt** Gnomenreigen, S145 No 2 (two recordings). Waldesrauschen, S145 No 1 **Paderewski** Caprice,

Op 14 No 3 **Pouishnoff** Music Box. Petite valse. Quand il pleut **Rachmaninov** Humoresque, Op 10 No 5. Polichinelle, Op 3 No 4. Prelude, Op 23 No 2 **Saint-Saëns/Godowsky** Carnaval des animaux – Le cygne **Schubert** Piano Sonata No 18, D894. Impromptu, D935 No 2 **Schubert/Godowsky** Moment musical, D780 No 3 **Schubert/Pouishnoff** Rosamunde – Ballet Music (two recordings)

**Leff Pouishnoff** *pf*

APR B ② APR6022 (149' • ADD)

Recorded 1922-58



You know you're getting on a bit when record labels start issuing as 'historic'

recordings which you bought when they were first released. A Saga EP of Leff Pouishnoff playing Chopin's *Fantaisie-Impromptu* was one of the first classical discs I ever bought with my own money. But what's this? From executive producer Michael Spring's supplement to Jonathan Summer's model booklet, I learn that there is the possibility that it may not be Pouishnoff playing at all but Sergio Fiorentino. Spring makes a good stab at unravelling the Saga saga, a continuing



record industry mystery involving the late William Barrington-Coupe, fraudster husband of his wife and accomplice Joyce Hatto.

Meanwhile, on disc 1, we alight on incontestably genuine Pouishnoff recordings that have not seen the light of day for many decades: 12 Columbia acoustics from 1922 which disclose a fiery and fluent technique allied to a blunt and perfunctory musicality. Repertoire junkies will enjoy two rare Saint-Saëns transcriptions, Glazunov's Polka played by a pupil of the composer and three brief encores by Pouishnoff himself. With the 13 Columbia electrics (1926-29), not only the sound improves but also Pouishnoff's response to the music. Chief among them is only the second recording ever made of a complete Schubert piano sonata, a reading of great integrity and delicacy that I found utterly captivating. For those to whom it matters, the first two movements are played without repeats. Here, in the two Liszt concert studies and the three Godowsky transcriptions, we get the full measure of a major artist and his famous luminous tone.

As to the selected Saga recordings of 1958, any poetry in the playing of the four Chopin pieces (and that's not saying much) is compromised by a badly voiced A flat above middle C. It does not affect the Glazunov Theme and Variations (originally entitled *Variations on a Finnish Folk Song*). While I wouldn't be without Stephen Coombs's 1995 Hyperion recording, which also offers separate tracks for each of the 15 variations, Pouishnoff's is a notable addition to the catalogue, with a spirit and spontaneity entirely lacking in the Chopin works. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## 'American Recital, Vol 2'

**Antheil** Jazz Sonata **Ives** Three-Page Sonata  
**MacDowell** New England Idylls, Op 62. Virtuoso Etudes, Op 46 - No 2; No 10. Woodland Sketches, Op 51 - No 1; No 6 **Reinagle** Piano Sonata No 1, 'Philadelphia' **Sessions** From My Diary

**Ulrich Roman Murtfeld** *pf*  
Audite © AUDITE97 740 (61' • DDD)



Ulrich Roman Murtfeld commences his second release devoted to American piano music with Alexander Reinagle's charming two-movement D major Sonata. Despite its *Philadelphia* nickname, the work is little more than a Haydn knock-off. Still, it's a skilfully put-together Classical sonata, and there's much to enjoy in Murtfeld's stylish, refined fingerwork. However, his

performance yields to Cecile Licad's altogether crisper, more incisive 2016 release (Danacord, A/16). Murtfeld's Edward MacDowell interpretations likewise face strong recorded competition. Compare his pleasantly symmetrical Op 46 *moto perpetuo* Étude to, say, Charles Fierro's lighter, fleeter reading (Delos) or his broad and heavy way with the *New England Idylls* next to the late James Barbagallo's vivid characterisations (Naxos) and you'll hear what I mean.

However, Murtfeld totally 'gets' the brash earnestness and boisterous energy of George Antheil's less-than-two-minute 1922 *Jazz Sonata*. He brings out the emotional contrasts between the Ives *Three Page Sonata*'s opening *Allegro moderato* and reposeful *Adagio*. But his tempo for the march-time *Allegro* lacks spirit and determination, while the *Più moto* ragtime send-up is thick, texturally undifferentiated and humourless. In *From My Diary*, one cannot fault Murtfeld's seriousness of purpose and dedication. That said, his forceful dynamism in the *Allegro pesante* finale sounds relatively foursquare alongside the late Robert Helps's more varied articulation. Likewise, Murtfeld reduces the *Allegro con brio*'s virtuosio passagework to a comfortable *mezzo-forte* lope, whereas Helps's fiery sweep occupies a whole different sound world. It's a pity that Murtfeld's energy and inspiration in the Antheil don't extend elsewhere in this excellently annotated and engineered release. **Jed Distler**

## 'Dreams & Fancies'

'English Music for Solo Guitar'

**Arnold** Fantasy, Op 107 **L Berkeley** Sonatina, Op 52 No 1 **Britten** Nocturnal After John Dowland, Op 70 **Dowland** Fantasia. Forlorn Hope Fancy. Praeludium **Walton** Five Bagatelles

**Sean Shibe** *gtr*  
Delphian © DCD34193 (67' • DDD)



It's no coincidence that the two 20th-century classical guitarists most successful in encouraging composers to write for their instrument, and consequently responsible for the richness of its repertoire – Andrés Segovia and Julian Bream – were also the most adept at 'selling' both the guitar and the music. That's to say, through talent, technique and sheer force of personality, they convinced you that you were hearing the greatest music ever written on the greatest instrument ever invented. Well, for a few minutes at least.

Whether any of the works in this debut solo recording by Scottish-Japanese guitarist Sean Shibe should be considered a masterpiece is debatable, though Britten's *Nocturnal* surely comes close. Certainly most of them were inspired by Bream's superlative artistry and are central to the guitar's repertoire. But that question need not concern us here. Because, under Shibe's fingers, they are all mesmerising.

The Walton Bagatelles are by turns playful, sensual and impetuous. The evocations of Spain in the Berkeley are brilliantly orchestrated. Shibe doesn't attempt to imitate the lute in the Dowland, opting instead to connect the tensions arising out of contrapuntal densities and masterful use of diminutions with the modern repertoire that precedes and follows the three pieces. The humour and colour inherent in the Arnold are articulated with a winning *sprezzatura*. Finally, to Britten's magnificent variations on Dowland's 'Come heavy sleep' Shibe brings an electrifyingly discursive quality, the occasional tendency to overplay here, as elsewhere, balanced by an even-tempered yet intensely reflective grace. **William Yeoman**

## 'Inspirations & Dreams'

**Debussy** Études **Enescu** Fiori de garoafa. Romanian Rhapsody No 1. Valse. Vierstimmige Fuge **Mihalovici** Five Bagatelles, Op 27 **Ravel** Gaspard de la nuit **Sarasate** Zigeunerweisen, Op 20 (arr Enescu) **Schumann** Ahnung. Piano Concerto, Op 54

**Luiza Borac** *pf* <sup>a</sup> **Romanian National Radio Orchestra**, Bucharest / **Horia Andreescu**  
Profil © ② PH17000 (155' • DDD)



Today's foremost champion of her compatriot George Enescu (1881-1955)

begins with three of his early works, new to CD but entirely derivative and, I would suggest, forgettable despite the coda of the third piece reproducing, we learn, 'Enescu's ad hoc interpretation from the 1950 interview for Radio France' – one for Enescu completists. There follow fine performances of *Gaspard* and *La valse* (Ravel was a friend of Enescu), the former notable more for its high drama and textual clarity than for its fantasy and colouring (Argerich, say, and Pogorelich). The highlight for this reviewer comes next: the Five Bagatelles (1934) by Marcel Mihalovici (1898-1985), a fellow Romanian whom Enescu advised to move to Paris in 1919. Technically undemanding, these unpretentious little poems are quite



Mesmerising: Sean Shibe plays a programme of English guitar music

delightful, the final 'Nocturne' clearly alluding to Satie's *Gymnopédies*. They are dedicated to Mihalovici's wife, Monique Haas. Disc 1 closes with two Enescu transcriptions, the first being an over-elaborate attempt to transfer Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* to the keyboard. The second is of his own popular *Rhapsodie roumaine* No 1, a showpiece that relies heavily on Enescu's brilliant orchestration to make its full effect. As a piano solo, around the halfway mark (6'30") onwards, it starts to become relentless. By the end, it had long outstayed its welcome even as a curiosity.

I would have left it there but the endearingly unpredictable Borac leaves Enescu for a second well-filled CD with both books of Debussy's *Études* followed by Schumann's Piano Concerto. By no means are either of these mere also-rans but vivid and compelling readings that belie their studio origins. If some of the *Études* are a little heavy-handed compared with, say, Gieseking or Uchida, the Concerto is a joy from beginning to end, tender and exuberant in equal measure, the first movement akin to Howard Shelley's exciting *Allegro affettuoso* (12'57" – Chandos, 5/09) than Wilhelm Kempff's (15'43" – DG). Borac concludes with 'Ahnung' (1'52"), an album leaf presented by Clara Schumann to a friend, only unearthed in 2009 (the CD tells us that it was originally

part of *Kinderszenen*), its world premiere in September 2009 given by this ever-resourceful and imaginative pianist.

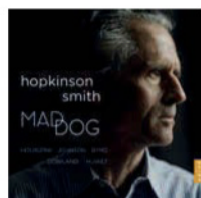
Jeremy Nicholas

### 'Mad Dog'

**Byrd** Pavan **Bray** **Dowland** Mr Dowland's Midnight. Prelude. The Shoemaker's Wife **Holborne** As it fell on a holly eve. The Fairy Round. Fantasy. Fare thee well. Heigh ho holiday. Mad Dog. Mr Holborne's Last Will and Testament. Muy Linda. My Selfe. Passion. Pavan & Galliard **Huwet/Dowland** Fantasy **J Johnson** Carman's Whistle. Day's End Pavan. Galliard to Delight. Johnson's Jewell. A Pavan to Delight. Ward's Repose

**Hopkinson Smith** *lute*

Naïve © E8940 (64' • DDD)



The American lutenist Hopkinson Smith was born in 1946. This beautiful album of

lute works melancholy and spry was recorded in 2015 but released only now. A 70th-birthday present to himself, perhaps? Certainly the continued presence on this earth of an artist such as Smith, whose recordings over the years of the rich German, French, Italian, English and Spanish repertoire for guitar, vihuela

and lute are surely one of the greatest musical ornaments of our own age, is worth celebrating.

In his somewhat philosophical booklet note, Smith claims that his 'naming of unnamed pieces ... can be seen as a natural extension' of the 'many types of extemporisation' that results from the fluency which develops when one grows 'into a repertoire and ingests its language and freedoms'. In compiling such a collection of these and other pieces, he says he is also following the Elizabethan example of assembling in a single manuscript 'works by various composers ... sometimes from different periods and styles copied by various scribes'.

The programme comprises works by John Dowland and his contemporaries, as well as music by a preceding generation of lute composers who counted among their number the great John Johnson and Anthony Holborne. But whether in a pavan like *Ward's Repose* (Smith's title, a tribute to a former teacher), one of the many galliards whose triple time belies their profundity or a grave, imitative fantasy like Dowland's after Gregorio Huwet, Smith's approach is the same: locate the soul of each piece through the most sophisticated and subtle use of extemporised embellishment you'll ever hear. Yes, it's that good. **William Yeoman**



# Pēteris Vasks

Andrew Mellor profiles the Latvian composer whose works mirror the suffering of his people – yet are lined with hope and beauty

**Y**ou may know the story of the Baltic region's journey to independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. But as it's a story that can be neither dimmed nor jaded by retelling, here it is again.

At the 1985 Latvian Song and Dance Festival, Soviet authorities inexplicably removed the song 'Gaismas pils' ('The Castle of Light') – a celebration of the Latvian nation – from the billing. Confused, upset but unperturbed, the thousands of singers taking part simply sang the song anyway, after the 'official' repertoire was done with.

As if surprised by the simplicity of their act of defiance and also by its inherent potential, the singers mustered. Numerous political movements took root in Latvia in the late 1980s, as they did in neighbouring Estonia and Lithuania. Then, on August 23, 1989, nationals from all three countries joined hands, forming a human chain all the way from Tallinn to Vilnius, via Riga – a distance of more than 600km. Standing there, many of them did what they knew best: they sang. Less than a year later, the Soviet-controlled Latvian parliament had set in motion the wheels of independence.

*'Suffering is not a game or a fantasy to me. I sit in the midst of it – I feel the heartbeat of suffering'*

On that day in 1989, and in the many non-violent singing protests that preceded it and followed it, the Baltic people literally sang their way to freedom. Never in recent European history has music played such a catalytic role in a process of political emancipation. As we mark the centenary of Finland's independence from Russia this year, we might stop to consider how history repeated itself in the Baltic States. In many a biography of Sibelius you can read the word 'Russification' in reference to Finland in the late 1800s into the start of the 20th century. You also come across the word in countless descriptions of Pēteris Vasks's Latvia a century later.

That was a long preamble to an article on Vasks's music, admittedly, but a necessary one. 'Suffering is not a game or a fantasy to me,' Vasks has said. 'I sit in the midst of it; my family sits in the midst of it; my people. I feel the heartbeat of suffering.' The suffering he speaks of is that of political repression, threatened identity, economic turmoil – of a Latvia 'drowning in alcoholism' in the last years of Soviet occupation. The Baltic States may be legally free, but they remain fragile. With their emancipation have come weighty responsibilities and sudden vulnerabilities, along with the frightening realities of climate change and runaway capitalism. 'It is impossible not to realise that we are balancing on the edge of time's end,' Vasks wrote in 2003.



Vasks's hope is that his music will bring joy to those who are suffering

The same unflinching honesty thrusts out of Vasks's music. The vast majority of his works address such global issues while also speaking unequivocally of their time and place. His music is inseparable from the peculiar sound and experience of the Baltic region in the years before and after the turn of the century.

That sound, occasionally identifiable by certain modal inflections and melodic patterns but in reality stretching way beyond those confines, speaks of a mournful but hopeful dignity in the face of pain, with an umbilical spiritual feed. It is a truly pan-Baltic expression, in which sense it mirrors Vasks's life. The composer studied and worked to the south in Lithuania, having been denied entry to the Latvian Conservatoire of Music under Soviet rule as his father was blacklisted as a Baptist minister. To the north, Vasks was inspired by elements of Estonian runic chant – which frequently informs his incantation-like melodies and repeating shapes – and by the sonority and stillness of Arvo Pärt. From his homeland, Vasks has suckled on indigenous Latvian folk music and on the harmonic and melodic imprint of the country's extraordinary choral tradition.

But Vasks looked to the West, too. Before his personal style took root, he was influenced by the aleatoric experiments of the Polish avant-garde. Soon, however, chance experiment gave way to real life. From the Poles, Vasks retained a tendency to conjure industrial-level fear and suffocation in his works, and more besides. But almost always with Vasks, the lingering nightmare of oppression is lined with the beauty of nature, the promise of faith and the belief that forgiveness, love and hope are the strongest tenets of human life.

Accordingly, the composer's most hackneyed quote is also that which explains both his importance and his popularity: 'I have always dreamed that my music would be heard in places where there are unhappy people: in hospitals and prisons, on



## VASKS FACTS

**Born** April 16, 1946, in Aizpute, Latvia

**Studied** the double bass at the Lithuanian State Conservatoire in Vilnius

**Denied** entry to the Latvian Conservatoire of Music owing to his father's occupation; later admitted after completing military service (1970-71) in the Soviet army, and studied composition there with Valentin Utkin (1973-78)

**Played** the double bass in a number of Lithuanian and Latvian orchestras, including the orchestra of the Latvian National Opera, Riga (1963-66), where he performed staples of the Russian and German repertory

**Won** Latvia's Great Music Award three times: in 1993 for *Litene*, in 1998 for *Distant Light* and in 2000 for his Symphony No 2

**Named** a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music in 2001

**Key quote** 'To my mind, every honest composer searches for a way out of the crises of his times – moving towards affirmation and faith'

overcrowded trams and buses.' The words were used in connection with the funeral piece *Musica dolorosa* (1983), written in memory of

the composer's deceased sister. And yet, when talking, Vasks's speech is littered with laughter; his wide jaws usually stretched in a smile. 'Being a composer is about sharing joy,' Vasks once said during an interview on Latvian television.

The composer's first violin concerto, *Tāla gaisma* ('Distant Light', 1996-97), has shared such joy – and immeasurably; it has been recorded around half a dozen times and is performed more regularly than any work of its kind and period. It bears copious Vasks fingerprints: an incantation-like melody with a distinctly sorrowful, Baltic shape; a clear but abstract narrative in which light and love prove victorious over darkness and hate; and an exploration of sonority which sees the music, as the title suggests, recede to the very edge of audibility while retaining its piercing strength.

It is pointless plotting lines of development in Vasks's output, so natural and consistent is his voice. But his five (to date) string quartets neatly introduce and develop some key ideas. All five are taut and direct, with an arc-like structure. The First (1977; rev 1997) and Fourth (1999) offset tortured, manic episodes with a slow, consoling chorale. The chorale as spiritual sustenance in instrumental music might have its roots in two biographical details: Vasks's father being a preacher ('When he gave his sermons it was as if the entire expression were spontaneous in the moment ... and that's what I do with music') and the fact that the authorities largely forbade the composition of choral music in Soviet Latvia. The Third Quartet (1995), meanwhile, uses both birdsong and Latvian folk song as allegories for freedom and emancipation.

The composer also explored the properties of the chorale in his strings-only first symphony, *Voices* (1991). Symphony No 2 (1998-99) in some ways echoes *Distant Light*'s journey to the horizon as it travels through rage and despair to a strange, luminous calm which Vasks has described as 'a sense of light-filled sorrow'. Symphony No 3 (2004-05) speaks of 'the fate of the Latvian people' in music that shows extraordinary resilience as it musters endless strength in the face of crushing challenges, revelling in its own sense of strain as much as Sibelius's Fifth. Works like the Cor Anglais Concerto (1989) and the solo piano cycle *Gadalaiki* ('The Seasons'; 1980-2008) may appear to deal with more innocent ideas, but the need to confront and dismiss oppressive forces still looms therein. In the latter piece, Vasks combines manic fervour with extraordinary refinement.

So what of the massed voices that led Vasks's Latvia to freedom? With texts censored and choral collaboration frowned upon under Soviet rule, Vasks's voices were initially those of his instruments. *Lauda* (1986) is an orchestral 'song' of praise to the Latvian nation that contains little jubilation but plenteous references to folk music in its pained depiction of an unhappy people. Seven years later, Vasks was free to use human voices without fear in *Litene* (1993), which recalls the Soviet annexation of Latvia in 1940 and the subsequent murder of Latvian soldiers. But Vasks is increasingly giving voice to his country, faith and view of the world through choral music – the music his father long wanted him to write, but which for so many years he couldn't. **G**

## LISTEN TO VASKS

Four pieces that cut to the heart of Vasks's music

**Cello Book**

Sol Gabetta vc

Sony Classical (2/16)

Vasks's moving second cello concerto, *Presence*, is the title-track on this disc (Amsterdam Sinfonietta under Candida Thompson), but more chronologically significant is *Grāmata čellam* ('Cello Book') from 1978, the year of Vasks's graduation. The work shows his probing technical determination with one instrument while telling – through song (the cellist uses her voice) as well as bowing and plucking – of his closeness to chant, hymnody and birdsong.

**Symphony No 2. Violin Concerto 'Distant Light'**

Tampere PO; Ostrobothnian CO / John Storgårds vtr;

Juha Kangas

Ondine (4/03)

Vasks's touchstone work *Distant Light*, the first of his violin concertos, is coupled here with the Second Symphony, which came two years later. Both pieces enshrine the central light-overcoming-darkness trajectory of Vasks's large-scale works, the symphony in particular continuing that line from Soviet-era composers including Shostakovich.

**Three Poems by Czesław Miłosz**

Latvian Radio Choir / Kaspars Putniņš

BIS (5/02)

There is a telling snapshot of Vasks's *a cappella* choral works on this disc from the outstanding radio choir that knows him so well. Perhaps most revealing of all, however, is the composer's distilled response to texts by Polish author Czesław Miłosz, set in English as *Three Poems* (1994-95): politically resonant, uncannily clear, impeccably performed and getting immediately to the heart of what makes Vasks Vasks.



# Vocal



**Richard Wigmore on upbeat sacred music by Simon Mayr:**

*'Amid all the facile theatricality are moments of real imagination and power'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



**Tim Ashley enjoys two contrasting discs of Kurt Weill songs:**

*'It all sounds very 1950s dance-band, as if Sinatra's and Bobby Darin's versions of "Mack the Knife" have served as models'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 99**

## Barber • Thompson

**Barber** *The Lovers*, Op 43

**Thompson** *Frostiana*

**Martin Hässler** bar **Saxony State Youth Choir;**

**Leipzig Youth Symphony Orchestra /**

**Ron-Dirk Entleutner**

Rondeau Production © ROP6138 (58' • DDD • T)



In a lovely piece of programming, Ron-Dirk Entleutner and the young musicians

of the Landesjugendchor Sachsen and the Jugendsinfonieorchester Leipzig here pair the hot sensuality of Samuel Barber's *The Lovers* with the cool innocence of Randall Thompson's *Frostiana*. Two iconic American choral cycles give these youth ensembles plenty of expressive scope but their potential isn't always fully realised in these performances.

Although both works are staples of American concert programming, neither is particularly well served on disc, making this new recording a bit of a missed opportunity. The folk-simplicity and ingenuous sweetness of the Thompson suits these singers (aged 16–30) far better, but it's a shame Robert Frost's beautiful words are all but lost in diction that's blowsy and diffuse, failing to drive the crisp rhythms of 'A Girl's Garden' forwards, and never quite finding the climactic warmth and power of 'Choose something like a star'.

The choral weaknesses are particularly galling given the quality of the orchestral playing from the Jugendsinfonieorchester Leipzig. There are some glorious wind solos in the Thompson – the heat-haze of the clarinet in 'The Pasture', the cheeky flute bird-calls of 'Come in'. The composer's own recording with Exultate (also using the work's orchestral arrangement) remains the benchmark.

Much the more sophisticated work, Barber's *The Lovers* matches the frank eroticism of Pablo Neruda's verse in mature musical gestures that demand

a broad palette of vocal colours. Craig Hella Johnson's superb choir *Conspirare* released the work in a new chamber arrangement (Harmonia Mundi, A/12), and it's interesting how much greater a depth of sound the group achieves, even with smaller forces. This new account is just a bit chaste, backing away from the music's confrontations and climaxes when the musicians should be pushing through. Baritone soloist Martin Hässler is, however, excellent. His 'Body of a Woman' is roughly, briskly sexual – only highlighting, by contrast, all that the rest of this performance is sadly not.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## Bednall

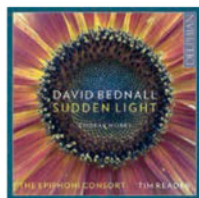
**'Sudden Light'**

*The Argument of His Book. Everyone Sang*<sup>a</sup>. *Lux orta est iusto. Rise up, my love*<sup>a</sup>. *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*. *Sonnet 98. Sudden Light. Te lucis ante terminum. Three Songs of Love. Tota pulchra es. A Wedding Prayer*<sup>a</sup>. *Welcome All Wonders - No 1, Alleluia; No 11, Tribus miraculis ornatum; No 13, But peaceful was the night*

**The Epiphoni Consort / Tim Reader** with

<sup>a</sup>**Stephen Farr** *org*

Delphian © DCD34189 (71' • DDD • T/t)



'Lux' – the opening word of the opening track on 'Sudden

Light', *Lux orta est iusto* – bursts into the ear, a glittering explosion of sound that scatters its bright shards in all directions with wonderful abandon. It's a brilliant moment of music-drama, one of many on a disc that reinforces composer David Bednall's real gift for word-setting.

Bednall has been quietly building up an impressive discography over the past few years, mostly thanks to the British label Regent, which most recently released his poignant *Stabat mater* (A/16). This new collection of choral works is interesting on two counts: as a chance to hear Bednall's

secular part-songs (less well represented on disc than his sacred works) and as the debut recording from the award-winning UK choir Epiphoni and their director Tim Reader.

Andrew Stewart's elegant booklet notes stress Bednall's Englishness, placing him in a long line of Romantic moderns like Edward Bawden and John Piper. But it's the French influences that strike most forcefully in the composer's sacred music, where a love of chant and some hazy, highly perfumed harmonies take us into the Catholic world of Duruflé, even Messiaen at times.

The exquisite miniature *Tota pulchra es* and the deft hymn-harmonisation of *Te lucis ante terminum* are representative of music that isn't afraid of simplicity, its lovely melodies needing the apology of no harmonic modesty-cover. Best though is the giddy ecstasy of the Song of Solomon setting *Rise up, my love*, with its swelling, priapic organ accompaniment, and the *Three Songs of Love* – beautifully crafted settings of verses by Clare and Yeats that serve their texts faithfully.

Meeting the demands of music that often occupies the extremes of the range, Epiphoni offer consistently efficient performances. However, a little upper-voice strain, both in tenors and sopranos, and a tendency to grip rather than release chords keeps them from fully realising this music's distinctively fluid grace.

**Alexandra Coghlan**

## Beethoven

**Missa solemnis**, Op 123

**Regine Hangler** *sop* **Elisabeth Kulman** *contr*

**Christian Elsner** *ten* **Franz-Josef Selig** *bass*

**MDR Radio Choir, Leipzig; Berlin Radio**

**Symphony Orchestra / Marek Janowski**

Pentatone © PTC5186 565 (73' • DDD/DSD)



The venue is the Berlin Philharmonie, the engineering teams of Pentatone and



The Epiphoni Consort and Tim Reader recording the glittering choral music of David Bednall at the church of St John the Evangelist in Upper Norwood, London

German radio familiar from many excellent recordings, but the combination does not pay off in a piece that will always make prodigious demands of all concerned.

Most of the solo singing is of the sub-operatic variety prevalent in oratorio recordings from the '60s and '70s. The tenor and especially soprano are stretched painfully by their parts; the bass has years of Fasolts behind him, and sounds like it; Elisabeth Kulman does what she can to lend firm dignity to the *Benedictus* and angst to the first military interruption of the 'Dona nobis', but she and her colleagues are badly muffled in the mix. While the chorus behind them is even more recessed, the first violins are given strange and undue prominence in subsidiary lines at the opening of the *Gloria* and *Credo* while winds and timpani disappear into a bassy rumble.

Such a context makes it harder to evaluate Janowski's contribution. Does the foursquare 'Gratias' plod because of an unduly slow *meno allegro* tempo, or the microphones relentlessly picking up the pizzicato thrum of the double bass? Rocky points such as the opening of the 'Qui tollis' are uncharacteristic of the conductor's work: this is apparently the record of a single concert, and the reasons for its preservation are not obviously compelling. **Peter Quantrill**

## Handel

Neun deutsche Arien, HWV202-210. Violin Sonata, Op 1 No 6 HWV364. Aria, HWV597. Gigue, HWV589. A Voluntary or A Flight of Angels, HWV600

**Marie Friederike Schöder** *sop* **Batzdorf Hofkapelle**  
Accent © ACC24326 (62' • DDD • T/t)



Ina Siedlaczek (Audite) and Gillian Keith (Channel Classics, 8/17), here is an enjoyable offering by Marie Friederike Schöder (a graduate of the University of Halle – the same institution at which the composer and the poet Barthold Heinrich Brockes would have first met). The nine arias are grouped into triptychs entitled 'Morality', 'Nature-Romanticisation' and 'Quiet Desire – Love', although Brockes's poems are essentially all about one thing: the individual's contemplation of the beauty of God's creation, and the blissfulness of a moral Christian life beyond reproach.

The treble-instrument stave is unlabelled in Handel's score; some scholars consider

that this probably signifies solo violin throughout but many performers take a different view and pursue flexible variety. It seems to me that mixing up instrumentation during individual arias is neither necessary nor desirable (such as when violinist Daniel Deuter takes over from oboist Xenia Löffler for the middle section of 'Künftiger Zeiten eitler Kummer'); however, spellbinding musicianship from all participants prevents any sense of unwelcome interventionism, and Löffler's recorder doubling the violin during 'Süsser Blumen Ambraflocken' is undeniably effective (I am less convinced by her oboe doubling the voice part in 'Flammende Rose'). Löffler's obbligato oboe is a soulful mirror to Schöder's articulate sensitivity in 'Die ihr aus dunklen Gräften' and 'Meine Seele hört im Sehen' (both musicians embellish with admirable taste), whereas 'Singe Seele, Gott zum Preise' and 'Das zitternde Glänzen' match Deuter's discreet *cantabile* fantasy to Schöder's rapt intimacy. The continuo parts are realised eloquently by Batzdorf Hofkapelle, whose musical pacing is almost always adroit – with the notable exception of an overly laboured 'Süsse Stille'.

**David Vickers**



## Handel

**Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, HWV46a**



**Sabine Devieille** *sop* **Sara Mingardo** *contr*

**Franco Fagioli** *countertenor* **Michael Spyres** *ten*

**Le Concert d'Astrée / Emmanuelle Haïm**

*Stage director* **Krzysztof Warlikowski**

*Video director* **Denis Guéguin**

Erato  9029 58193-6;  9029 58192-9

(138' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DD5.1 & PCM stereo •

O • S/s)

Recorded live at the Théâtre de l'Archevêché,

Aix-en-Provence, France, July 2016



Handel's first oratorio (Rome, 1707) is a moral dispute over the eternal happiness of the naive Beauty (Bellezza), who

struggles to reject the short-termist sensual temptations offered by Pleasure (Piacere) but receives wise and benevolent counsel from Time (Tempo) and Enlightenment (Disinganno). The 22-year-old Handel's prodigious score wholeheartedly endorses Cardinal Pamphili's allegorical libretto of *vanitas vanitatum* with music of charm, compassion, brilliance (when required) and occasionally dramatic impetus.

None of the moral that godly virtue is preferable to carnal selfishness survives in Krzysztof Warlikowski's rigidly subversive staged production (filmed last summer at the Aix-en-Provence Festival). Sabine Devieille's mentally ill Bellezza, her unnamed dancing boyfriend and Franco Fagioli's greasy, thrill-seeking Piacere have been raving it up in a bisexual threesome at a dodgy nightclub when they take some dodgy pills; the anonymous lover dies from the overdose, Bellezza recovers only physically from her bad trip but is emotionally and psychologically fragile, whereas Piacere seems to get over the ordeal in his stride; Bellezza's abusive sex-pest father Tempo (more than a whiff of hypocrisy in Michael Spyres's dislikeable manner) and long-suffering mother Disinganno (Sara Mingardo) attempt to persuade their prodigal daughter to give up the wild life and return to the fold – most of this unfolds before the end of the Sinfonia. During the production it becomes apparent that Tempo and Disinganno are more corrupt, damaged and darker than the fun-loving Piacere, whose secularised honesty transforms him into the anti-moral hero. Needless to say, Bellezza's eventual choice in favour of moral rectitude is depicted as the unhinged despair of a vulnerable and deeply traumatised young woman, who commits suicide in order to escape from the conflicts around her (and

her inner demons); in her closing aria 'Tu del ciel ministro eletto' she slits her wrists and bleeds to death. All of the above leaves a bitter aftertaste that cuts against the grain of the work's poetic and musical meaning, and the experience is predictably convoluted, clumsy, crass and joyless.

Emmanuelle Haïm's musical direction is hampered by many of the same drawbacks evident in her audio recording of the oratorio (Virgin, 2007): fast tempos are too rushed, slow tempos drag lugubriously, the rhetorical nature of some arias is misconceived, over-exaggerated playing diminishes Le Concert d'Astrée's effectiveness and organ continuo intrudes too much. Moreover, five numbers are cut and the interval is positioned in the wrong place. Sabine Devieille is blessed with a phenomenal instrument and Sara Mingardo's mature artistry has the benefit of considerable experience in this repertoire. Franco Fagioli's contorted vowels, singing fractionally behind the beat, and one-dimensional velocity in quick music are not my idea of Pleasure (his creamy 'Lascia la spina' is lovelier, although the indulgent slow pacing fails to convey the musical material's distinctly different function from its later reinvention as 'Lascia ch'io pianga' in *Rinaldo*). Michael Spyres's mostly loud delivery and clumsy ornamentation grates. Indeed, the majority of singers' embellishments are unstylish premeditations that lack spontaneity and are often ruinous recompositions inferior to Handel's notated guidelines: Bellezza's final scene is merely decorous rather than profoundly truthful. **David Vickers**

## Isaac


**'Nel tempo di Lorenzo de' Medici & Maximilian I, 1450-1519'**

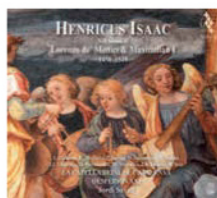
**Anonymous** O Welt, ich muss dich lassen

**Isaac** A la battaglia. Angeli, Archangeli. Christus, filius Dei. Circumdederunt me. Hora e di maggio. Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen. La mi la sol. La morra. Optime Divino date munere pastor ovili. O Welt, ich muss dich lassen. Palle, palle. Parce, Domine. Quis dabit capiti meo aquam?. Sancti spiritus assit nobis gratia. Sustinuimus pacem

**La Capella Reial de Catalunya;**

**Hespèrion XXI / Jordi Savall**

Alia Vox  AVSA9922 (76' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This year is Isaac year (he died in 1517) but so far it has seen

few additions to the discography. Hespèrion XXI's programme follows Jordi Savall's favoured format of the

musical diary, whereby major events of the composer's life are commemorated with a piece. A high proportion of his most famous pieces is included, which some may think a missed opportunity given how much of his music is virgin territory on disc (the motet *Christus, filius Deus* is the famous *Virgo prudentissima* with a new text celebrating the imperial accession of Charles V two years after Isaac's death).

That needn't matter when the performances catch the ear but on this occasion Savall's wonted flair seems to have eluded him. These interpretations might have been made 40 years ago, with drums and bells added to voices and instruments and tempos on the slow side, giving a rather static impression. (The bells are a particular distraction, being fractionally late much of the time.) The vocal ensemble sounds under-prepared and hesitant in the face of music that demands to be grabbed by the scruff of the neck (try the opening duet of *Christus, filius Deus* or the whole of *Angeli, archangeli*, which The Clerks' Group performed with such gumption over 20 years ago – ASV, 3/95) or delivered with more feeling (*Quis dabit capiti meo aquam?*, the poignant lament for Isaac's patron Lorenzo the Magnificent). Most surprising, even the instrumental ensemble sounds a touch jaded in *La morra*, *Palle, palle* and *La mi la sol*. This may be due to the sound recording, which lacks the intended opulence; but in sum, there are few pieces for which more stylish and satisfying recorded alternatives don't already exist. The accompanying booklet is lavishly illustrated, as always with Alia Vox, though the painted representation of Lorenzo the Magnificent is in fact that of his grandson and namesake Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino.


**Fabrice Fitch**

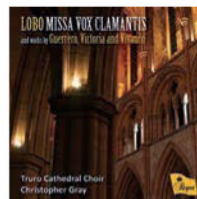
## Lobo • Guerrero • Victoria • Vivanco

**Guerrero** Simile est regnum caelorum **Lobo**

Missa Vox clamantis **Victoria** Missa Simile est regnum caelorum. O quam gloriosum est regnum **Vivanco** Magnificat octavi toni

**Truro Cathedral Choir / Christopher Gray**

Regent  REGCD491 (61' • DDD • T/t)



As austere beautiful as the cathedrals that it filled, the music of the Spanish Renaissance stands apart from its Italian and French counterparts. It's a sound world of pointed arches and thrusting verticals that has little interest in anything as insipid as loveliness. This recording by Christopher Gray and



Truro Cathedral Choir and conductor Christopher Gray celebrate the austere beauty of Lobo and other Iberian Golden Age composers

the Truro Cathedral Choir celebrates this distinctive style, bringing together a handful of Iberian Golden Age composers for a programme built around two comparatively little-known Mass settings.

Based on an unknown motet, Duarte Lobo's *Missa Vox clamantis* is darkly modal, its skilful counterpoint woven so tightly that scarcely a flicker of light breaks into its intricate flow. The head motif, with its upwards octave leap, gives much of the music an athletic quality which, together with Gray's energised, forward-driving phrasing and the forthright delivery of Truro's fine choristers, makes for an exciting performance. It's such a different texture to the cool legatos and transparent solo verse sections of The Tallis Scholars' classic recording that comparisons are perhaps unhelpful. But what we do get from the earlier performance is a fuller base to the sound, a firmer sense of harmonic anchor than the Truro lay clerks provide here.

Compared to the severity of the Lobo, Victoria's *Missa Simile est regnum* is positively sunny and Gray's singers unbend into attractive warmth. If the phrasing from the trebles is occasionally a little choppy, then the pay-off is polyphony that never loses momentum, pushing right through to the sudden, welcome stillness of the solo

*Benedictus*. Is it an improvement on Stephen Darlington and the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford? On balance I think it is, pushed over the line by the clarity and depth of the recording quality and the more sympathetic acoustic of Truro's Cathedral. **Alexandra Coghlan**

*Lobo – comparative version:*

*Tallis Scholars, Phillips (3/93) (GIME) CDGIM028*

*Victoria Missa simile est regnum – selected comparison:*

*Christ Church Cath Ch, Darlington (NIMB) NI5434*

## Mansurian

### Requiem

**Anja Petersen** *sop* **Andrew Redmond** *bar*

**RIAS Chamber Choir; Munich Chamber**

**Orchestra / Alexander Liebreich**

ECM New Series © 481 4101 (45' • DDD • T)



*The Colour of Pomegranates*) as for the concert hall, Tigran Mansurian (b1939) follows a stylistic path drawing on aspects of modernism and minimalism, though without being beholden to either. His Requiem (2015) – 'Dedicated to the

memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide' – seeks a fine balance between the high emotion of the Catholic Requiem and inner communing of the Orthodox Hokehankist. The scoring, for 35-strong choir and 20-piece string orchestra, duly reinforces this in its interweaving supple vocal melisma with archaic modal harmony.

This is evident at the outset of the 'Requiem aeternam', its salient motifs recalled near the close of the 'Agnus Dei' to effect poignant closure. The eight movements range selectively over the Latin text, in music whose nearest European equivalents are Requiems by Maurice Duruflé (the lambent harmony of the 'Lacrimosa') and Frank Martin (the serene majesty of the 'Sanctus'), yet Mansurian elides between Occident and Orient with the deftest understatement.

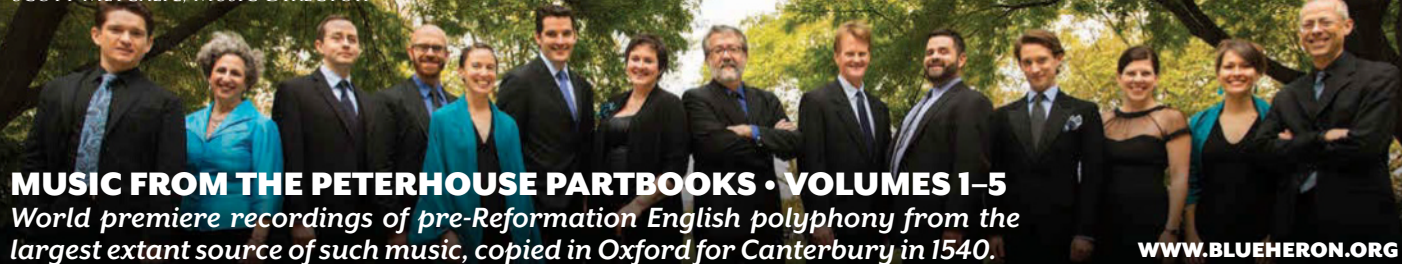
Alexander Liebreich conducts an account fully recognising the premises of this piece, with Anja Petersen as finely attuned to the ethereal solo writing of the 'Tuba mirum' as Andrew Redmond is to the eloquent 'Hostias' of the 'Domine Jesu Christe' which forms the climactic and most involving section. Sound has the distanced spaciousness typical of ECM's 'house style', while there is a detailed note by Paul Griffiths with introductory remarks from





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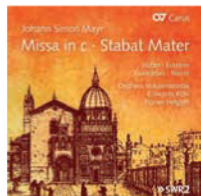
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the composer. Those coming anew to this rarely predictable composer could well begin here. **Richard Whitehouse**

## Mayr

Mass, 'Einsiedeln Mass'. Stabat mater

**Katja Stuber** *sop* **Marion Eckstein** *contr* **Fernando Guimarães** *ten* **Tareq Nazmi** *bass* **Orpheus Vocal Ensemble**; **Concerto Köln** / **Florian Helgath**  
Carus © CARUS83 480 (78' • DDD • T/t)



In his lifetime Haydn was frequently taken to task for the worldliness of his

Masses – too much of the ballroom and the opera house, not enough of sobriety and penitential gloom. But they seem positively Cistercian in their restraint alongside the C minor Mass of the Italianised German Simon Mayr, first performed in the Abbey of Einsiedeln, Switzerland, in 1826.

Mayr's *Kyrie*, overtly based on the opening theme of Beethoven's C minor Piano Trio, Op 1 No 3, has an imposing gravitas. Thereafter much of the Mass, with its jaunty march rhythms and tootling woodwind solos, sounds like *opera buffa* by other means – typical of Italian sacred music of the day. Rapidly losing his sight in the mid-1820s, Mayr filched movements by his star pupil Donizetti for large chunks of the *Credo*. Never can the Resurrection have provoked such unbridled jollity as here. Yet amid the rather facile theatricality – Donizetti's and Mayr's own – are moments of real imagination and power: say, in the dramatic choral interjections of the 'Qui tollis', or the 'Crucifixus', with its tortuous violin obbligato and ominous hushed trumpets. And if Mayr's mellifluous setting of the 'Agnus Dei' is neither shadowed nor supplicatory, it is enlivened by a florid clarinet solo that could have strayed out of a Weber Clarinet Concerto.

The *Stabat mater* from some 20 years earlier is a similarly mixed bag. Gently expressive numbers, often with a nod to Pergolesi's famous setting, rub shoulders with movements that seem almost indecently cheerful, even by the Italian standards of the time. The fervent plea to the Virgin in 'Eia mater' here becomes a cue for a frolic around the Cross, courtesy of a skittering duet for soprano and solo violin. Despite moments of flatness, Katja Stuber sings this with grace and spirit. Of the other soloists, Tareq Nazmi impresses with his dark, hieratic bass, while Fernando Guimarães sings his 'Stabat mater' solo with attractive lyrical tone and shapely phrasing, and combines eloquently with

Stuber in the Mass's 'Qui tollis'. Under Florian Helgath's vigorous direction the chorus sound disciplined and full-bodied, though they are not best served by the cavernous church resonance. A prime pleasure in works that blur the sacred and the secular is the playing of Concerto Köln, whether en bloc or in the instrumental solos that so often redeem Mayr's invention from blandness. **Richard Wigmore**

## Rachmaninov

Vespers, 'All-Night Vigil', Op 37

**Klaudia Zeiner** *contr* **Falk Hoffmann** *ten*  
**MDR Radio Choir** / **Risto Joost**

Genuin © GEN17476 (58' • DDD • T/t)



This recording joins what is now a very crowded market indeed, so much

has Rachmaninov's masterpiece become part of the choral repertoire the world over. The MDR Rundfunkchor already has experience with Russian choral repertoire, having recently recorded a fine disc of Bortnyansky and Schnittke, and Estonian conductor Risto Joost's familiarity with the Russian tradition helps to make this an outstanding addition to that market.

The tone (or rather, the stage) is set by the addition of the dialogue between deacon and priest before the opening choral 'Amin', so that it does not simply come out of nowhere. Contralto Klaudia Zeiner is truly excellent in the following 'Blagoslovi, dushe moye', as is the tenor Falk Hoffmann, notably in the 'Nyne otpuschaeshi', where he finds exactly the right combination of lightness and incision. Neither does the bass section disappoint in the famous descent down to the low B flat. Joost paces the work very well indeed, understanding that there is a dramatic arc which it is imperative to transmit, so that the work is not merely a sequence of isolated events, though there are individual moments that particularly stand out, such as the crescendo of the final section of 'Svete tikhi' or the bouncing final section of 'Blagosloven esi Gospodi'. He takes a risk with the slow speeds he chooses for 'Bogoroditse Devo' and the 'Shestopsalmie' but it pays off, because the tension never lets up, the line is never lost.

Pronunciation of the Slavonic by both choir and soloists is excellent, though somebody should have caught the egregious statement in the booklet that 'All works are sung in the Russian language' ... indeed, the only serious reservations I have concern the booklet: the translations into

English of the texts were made from German, not from Slavonic, and are correspondingly odd; there are similarly some infelicities in the translation of Harald Hodeige's extensive notes. None of this detracts from the performance itself, however, which can join the ranks of the very best available. The excellent recording was made at the Paul-Gerhardt-Kirche in Leipzig. **Ivan Moody**

## Schubert

'Arias & Overtures'

**Adrast**<sup>a</sup> – Ein schlafend Kind! ... In diesem waldumschloss'nen und abgeleg'nen Raum; Meine Seele, die dich liebt. **Alfonso und Estrella** – Overture; Schon, wenn es beginnt zu tagen, wird in mir die Sehnsucht wach<sup>a</sup>; Wenn ich die Holde sehe<sup>a</sup>. **Claudine von Villa Bella** – Es erhebt sich eine Stimme<sup>a</sup>. **Fierrebras**<sup>a</sup> – Der Abend sinkt auf stiller Flur; Was quälst du mich, oh Missgeschick! ... In tief bewegter Brust. Die Freunde von Salamanka<sup>a</sup> – Aus Blumen deuten die Damen gern; Es murmeln die Quellen, es leuchtet der Stern. **Lazarus**, D689<sup>a</sup> – Wenn ich ihm nachgerungen haben. Die Zauberglöckchen<sup>a</sup> – Der Tag entflieht, der Abend glüht. Die Zauberpfeife – Overture; Act 3, Overture; Was belebt die schöne Welt?<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Daniel Behle** *ten*

**L'Orfeo Baroque Orchestra** / **Michi Gaigg**

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 40721-2 (60' • DDD • T/t)



Handicapped by stilted, slow-moving librettos, Schubert's stage works, like

Haydn's, seem forever destined to languish on the margins of the repertoire. Even the most impressive, *Alfonso und Estrella* and *Fierrabras*, tend to unfold as a series of static tableaux rather than as constantly evolving dramas-in-music. For long stretches they can sound like a medley of orchestrated songs, with *Gemütlichkeit* and Biedermeier charm the default modes.

Yet, Schubert being Schubert, the purely musical delights are legion. *Die Zauberpfeife* and *Fidelio* are the prime influences in this appealing selection of tenor arias that ranges from the 1815 Singpiel *Die Freunde von Salamanka*, via numbers from the fragmentary *Adrast* and the unfinished Easter cantata *Lazarus*, to the 'heroic-romantic' *Fierrabras*.

Melodic allure and Schubertian harmonic magic are a given, though the dramatic power of the anguished scena from *Das Zauberglöckchen* (one of two numbers Schubert composed for a Viennese production of Hérold's



*La clochette*) may surprise the unwary. The nostalgic *Adrast* aria is a little-known gem, while *Alfonso's* 'Schon wenn es beginnt zu tagen', with its catchy polonaise rhythm, could well have become a Schubertian favourite had it appeared in the Peters Edition of his songs.

Admired especially in Bach and Mozart, Daniel Behle is a German lyric tenor in the Peter Schreier mould, though his timbre is smoother and rounder, with a honeyed *mezza voce* and no hint of grittiness at *forte*. Most of the music here demands, and gets, a fine-spun line, grace of phrasing and an easy flexibility. Yet with a touch of steel in his tone, Behle rises without strain to the more rigorous challenges of the *Fierrabras* and *Zauberglückchen* numbers. He is a thoughtful interpreter, too, with a Lieder singer's care for words, and finds as much individual character as the music allows, including a twinkling sense of humour in a cynical *buffo* aria from *Die Freunde von Salamanka*. Under Michi Gaigg's lively direction, the Orfeo Baroque Orchestra are responsive accompanists (plaudits to the first oboe and first clarinet in their many carolling dialogues with the singer), and on their own give vigorous and colourful performances of the splendid overtures to *Die Zaubergeige* and *Alfonso*.

Richard Wigmore

## Schubert

Schwanengesang<sup>o</sup>. Klavierstück, D946 No 2

<sup>o</sup>Stephan Genz bar Michel Dalberto pf

Aparté © AP151 (66' • DDD • T/t)



A couple of years ago Stephan Genz and Michel Dalberto released a *Winterreise*

that was welcomed in these pages by Richard Wigmore for its unblinking clarity of approach (Claves, 1/16). That performance dated from as far back as 2010, while this new *Schwanengesang* was recorded at the beginning of this year.

It's a great deal less clear what the approach is here – a reflection perhaps of the less focused nature of this opportunistically assembled final 'cycle'. There's an impressive single-mindedness and urgency to several numbers – 'In der Ferne' and 'Am Meer' are built up seriously and patiently, for example. Others, such as 'Kriegers Ahnung', feel surprisingly short on tension; the 'Ständchen' strikes me as heavy and portentous.

Another major factor, though, is the condition of Genz's voice, which sounds distinctly frayed and underpowered in

comparison to the *Winterreise*. Its characteristic soft grain is now closer to woolliness, its dynamic range apparently greatly reduced. Anything from about *mezzo-forte* and above sounds effortful, while a great deal is whispered – effectively, it turns out, in a light-touch performance of 'Der Abschied'.

Genz's interpretative skills are still in evidence and there are plenty of moments to enjoy still in Dalberto's playing, particularly in the way he exploits his Bösendorfer's rich lower register. But there's an inevitable sense of compromise in uncomfortable accounts of 'Der Atlas' and 'Der Doppelgänger', while the engineering places Dalberto rather too far back in the sound picture – I found myself adjusting the volume in an attempt to bring voice and piano into satisfying balance.

The second of the D946 *Klavierstücke* (not all three of the set, as the disc's cover misleadingly suggests) is programmed between the Rellstab and Heine songs, but Dalberto's performance of it is disappointingly over-romanticised and certainly not enough of a bonus, I'm afraid, to make this disc preferable to any number of alternative *Schwanengesang* recordings.

Hugo Shirley

## R Strauss

Acht Lieder aus Letzte Blätter, Op 10 – No 1, Zueignung; No 2, Nichts; No 3, Die Nacht; No 8, Allerseelen. Ständchen, Op 17 No 2. Sechs Lieder aus Lotusblättern, Op 19 – No 2, Breit' über mein Haupt; No 4, Wie sollten wir geheim sie halten. Vier Lieder, Op 27 – No 1, Ruhe, meine Seele!; No 3, Heimliche Aufforderung. Drei Lieder, Op 29 – No 2, Schlagende Herzen; No 3, Nachtgang. Sehnsucht, Op 32 No 2. Das Rosenband, Op 36 No 1. Meinem Kinde, Op 37 No 3. Fünf Lieder, Op 39 – No 1, Leises Lied; No 4, Befreit. Muttertändelei, Op 43 No 2. Ich Schwebte, Op 48 No 2. Acht Lieder, Op 49 – No 1, Waldseligkeit; No 8, Ach, was Kummer, Qual und Schmerzen. Einerlei, Op 69 No 3. Rote Rosen, AV76. Weihnachtsgefühl, WoO94

Louise Alder sop Joseph Middleton pf

Orchid © ORC100072 (65' • DDD)



In a note in the booklet to her debut album, Louise Alder talks about her 'personal

passionate love affair' with Richard Strauss, which, she explains, was cemented when she stepped in as Sophie in Glyndebourne's 2014 Proms performance of *Der Rosenkavalier*. That love for the composer – and his songs – is vividly articulated at every point throughout this lovely disc.

The programme is split into seven small sections, which map both a loose biographical trajectory (from 'Youth' to 'Loss' and 'Release') and a kind of *Jugendstil* emotional landscape – presenting feelings, of course, which Strauss revels in stirring in together. Each song sounds utterly fresh, with the bright, flinty beauty of Alder's soprano constantly conveying lively intelligence as well as strong characterisation. The interpretations are natural and confident, her German vividly pointed (she's been a member of the ensemble of Oper Frankfurt since 2014).

There's mischief in the lighter numbers, beautiful tenderness in 'Breit' über mein Haupt' and 'Das Rosenband', and seductiveness in 'Ständchen' and a terrific account of 'Heimliche Aufforderung'. As one might expect, the voice lacks an element of Straussian richness you get from some of the big guns in this repertoire but this doesn't stop Alder offering powerful, grand performances of 'Befreit' and 'Ruhe, meine Seele!'.

She is excellent in the expressionistic depths of the remarkable 'Sehnsucht' and offers unusually pensive, moving accounts of 'Zueignung' and 'Allerseelen' – placed in that final 'Release' section. Her control is exquisite, too, and I found myself anticipating each occasion (such as in the ascents of 'Waldseligkeit') where the music takes the voice into its sweet upper reaches, where her pure, bell-like tone is dabbed with delicate touches of vibrato.

Joseph Middleton's piano-playing is superb throughout as well, offering perceptive, lively and sensitive accompaniment entirely on Alder's wavelength – listen to the lilt he brings, for example, to the start of 'Ich Schwebte'. Orchid Classics' sound captures both of them naturally; and although it's a shame the booklet doesn't run to texts and translations, we do get a comprehensive and detailed booklet note from Joanna Wyld. All in all, this debut is a delight.

Hugo Shirley

## Sviridov

Russia Cast Adrift (arr Stetsyuk).

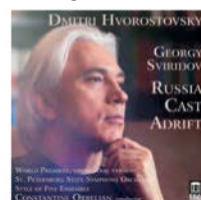
Petersburg – The Virgin in the City

Dmitri Hvorostovsky bar Style of Five Ensemble;

St Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra /

Constantine Orbelian

Delos © DE1631 (37' • DDD • T/t)



This recording presents an orchestration of Sviridov's song-cycle



Grace of phrasing and easy flexibility: Daniel Behle and the Orfeo Baroque Orchestra under Michi Gaigg perform rarely heard Schubert arias and overtures

on verses by Yesenin, *Russia Cast Adrift* (which Hovorostovsky has already recorded in its piano version – Philips, 8/96 – nla), in a remarkable arrangement made by Evgeny Stetsyuk for orchestra and Russian folk instruments. It is remarkable because it brings out all the colour inherent in the piano original – think of the ‘symphonic dimension’ of the piano accompaniments of Mussorgsky or Shostakovich – without sacrificing anything of Sviridov’s fluid style. Maya Pritsker, in her notes, observes that the ‘new orchestration also dramatically magnifies both the epic scope and profound philosophical meaning of the work’, and points out that this is conveyed in the composer’s description of it as a ‘vocal poem’.

It is a perfect vehicle for Hovorostovsky’s voice, enabling him to exploit its power and resonance to the full, for example, in the third song, ‘Open before me, O my guardian angel’, though some of the most memorable moments are more intimate and reflective, as in the fourth, ‘Silver Path’, and the sixth, ‘Simon, Peter ...’, in which the singer beautifully displays his silvery high register. The orchestration paradoxically brings out the intimacy of a number of the settings (the fourth, again) merely ‘sketched in’, so to speak, in the

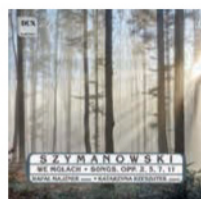
piano original, and also naturally amplifies the blackness that also surfaces not infrequently – the whirling textures of the astral vision that is the eighth song, ‘Beyond the hills of the Milky Way’, are a particularly impressive example of this, making the fearful darkness and foreboding very much present. The extra track, ‘The Virgin in the City’ from another work by Sviridov, *Petersburg, a Vocal Poem*, is particularly moving.

Both performance and recording (made at the Radio House in St Petersburg) are surely everything the composer would have wanted. **Ivan Moody**

## Szymanowski

Six Songs, Op 2. Three Fragments from Poems by Jan Kasproicz, Op 5. Swan, Op 7. Four Songs, Op 11

Rafał Majzner *ten* Katarzyna Rzeszutek *pf*  
Dux © DUX1369 (50' • DDD)



between 1900 and 1905. They are youthful works, then, which point to the composer’s

future characteristics without quite presenting a fully developed voice. Influences are many and varied – though more from France and Russia, significantly, than Germany.

The Op 2 set offers plenty of echoes of Tchaikovskian wistfulness to match poetry of regulation late-Romantic pessimism and sensuality. The larger-scale *Three Fragments*, Op 5, are more broadly thoughtful, setting words of quiet obsessiveness to music that mixes religiosity with pent-up emotion. Szymanowski’s ‘Swan’ is a fateful harbinger of suffering; and nature is similarly a source of angst and fear in the Op 11 songs, where the maudlin first two numbers (‘Joyless am I’ and ‘In the enchanted forests’) are saved by the urgent final two, ‘Flying over me into the sapphire sea’ and ‘Roar, storm!’.

There’s some atmospheric, interesting music here, but I can’t find much to enjoy in Rafał Majzner’s pallid, undernourished singing – his tenor is musty in the middle of the range and turns unvarnished and colourless anywhere above about an F. Katarzyna Rzeszutek offers dutiful accompaniments, the recorded sound giving her piano a somewhat artificial tone. An eccentric – and eccentrically translated – booklet note gives only sketchy



ĒRIKS EŠENVALDS

# The Doors of Heaven

Portland State Chamber Choir  
Ethan Sperry

“*Ešenvalds’ colorful, dramatic and multi-voiced works on the album reveal skillfully set narrative texts ranging from folk material to liturgical. An important new recording of works by a rising star in choral composition and a top-notch chorus and I am pleased to recommend it enthusiastically.*

— Morten Lauridsen

The Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds has rapidly become one of the world’s most performed choral composers. His ability to bring a dramatic text to life through textures that are lush yet permeated with a more stringent and angular aesthetic has ensured a steady stream of commissions from leading orchestras and choral forces.

The four works on the album reflect an interest in the beauty of nature, religious faith and legend. *The First Tears* is based on the Inuit legend of the Raven and the Whale, a story of how grief came into the world. *Passion and Resurrection* is a profound and powerful exploration of Christ’s death and resurrection constructed from a variety of liturgical sources.

Led by Ethan Sperry, Portland State Chamber Choir has recorded the music of Margaret Garwood, Veljo Tormis and Morten Lauridsen. Their album *A Drop in the Ocean* was a finalist for the 2012 American Prize in Choral Music and the 2014 release *Into Unknown Worlds* was named a “record to die for” by *Stereophile*. The Choir has performed and competed in venues across the US and around the world.



#### TRACKLIST

The First Tears

Rivers of Light

A Drop in the Ocean

Passion and Resurrection

Recorded January and May 2016

St Stephen’s Catholic Church

Portland, Oregon



Spectacular: Martin Yates resurrects Vaughan Williams's music for Scott of the Antarctic

information about the songs, and the track-listing wrongly places 'Swan' after the Op 5 *Fragments*.

The young Piotr Bezcala's superior recording of these works, released as part of Channel Classics' four-disc set of the composer's songs (11/04), seems to have been deleted. Even so, I still find it difficult to offer much of a recommendation for this newcomer, whose usefulness is further undermined by the absence of any texts or translations.

Hugo Shirley

## Vaughan Williams

Scott of the Antarctic

Ilona Domnich *sop* Christopher Nickol *org*

Royal Scottish National Women's Chorus

and Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch (F) CDLX7340

(80' • DDD)



Vaughan Williams must have been gratified by the positive reaction to his score for *Scott of the Antarctic*. The film was selected as the Royal Film Performance at the Empire, Leicester Square, in 1948, and then went on to become the third most

popular film at the UK box office the following year. The music was played on the soundtrack by the Philharmonia Orchestra (UK orchestras were named often on British films in the post-war era), who went on to record a selection of the music on an HMV 78rpm disc under the film's conductor and music editor Ernest Irving.

In 2004, 18 cues of *Scott of the Antarctic* were assembled for an all-Vaughan Williams CD (Chandos, 12/02) but now we have Dutton's complete score of 41 cues transcribed and edited by Martin Yates, the conductor of this recording. Coming in at nearly 80 minutes' playing time to the 40 minutes of music heard on the film soundtrack, you have a good indication of how much music was omitted in the final edit. Let's be thankful for all this extra music as a result of Yates's exploration of the source material.

His research not only demonstrates the wide variety of music that Vaughan Williams composed for the film, most of it put down before it went into production, but also throws further light on the composition of the *Sinfonia antartica* of seven years later. Although some tracks are short, each is a satisfying listen in its own right.

In homing in on the essential theme of the film, man against nature, for the

subsequent *Sinfonia antartica*, it's fascinating to discover what Vaughan Williams retained of his film score and what he discarded, which included most of the lighter material with the notable exception of that picturesque theme for the wobbly penguins. In 'Oriana' the string melody, closely related to that aspiring theme in the opening movement of the Sixth Symphony, has gone, but the second half of that same cue, a plaintive tune on oboe, was retained for the opening and closing of his 'Intermezzo' movement.

The film score, like the subsequent *Sinfonia*, is dominated by the dogged heroic theme that opens both pieces. But, despite the sombre tone of much of the film music as the story moves to its inexorable ending, the mood is enlivened by character sketches of the explorers and their wives, both witty and lyrical, as well as an array of marches, one of them ('Base Camp'), recalling 'Seventeen come Sunday', another ('Queen's Birthday March'), apparently of dubious authenticity, redolent of the marches of Kenneth J Alford of 'Colonel Bogey' fame.

The spectacular set pieces are given full measure by Yates and the RSNO, with the Russian soprano Ilona Domnich adding her own icy tones to those bleak landscapes. As a performance it's in line with the dignified approach to Scott's adventure taken by the





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GRAMOPHONE

1977 40TH ANNIVERSARY 2017

director of the film, Charles Frend. The recording has a weight and a transparency of detail which does full justice to the panoply of colours. This is as significant an event in the VW discography as that of the 1913 version of the Symphony No 2 by the LSO and Hickox in 2001 (Chandos, 7/01).

Adrian Edwards

## Weill

'Wanted'

Der Abschiedsbrief. Alabama Song<sup>a</sup>. Barbarasong. Berlin im Licht<sup>a</sup>. Buddy on the Nightshift<sup>a</sup>. Denn wie man sich bettet, so liegt mann. Kanonensong<sup>a</sup>. I'm a stranger here myself. Je ne t'aime pas. Das Lied von den braunen Inseln. Die Morität von Mackie Messer. Der Seeräuber-Jenny. Surabaya Johnny. Youkali. Zuhälterballade<sup>a</sup>

Dagmar Pecková *mez*<sup>a</sup> Jiří Hájek *bar*

Miroslav Hloucal Jazz Band; Epoque

Quartet and Orchestra / Jan Kučera

Supraphon © SU4226-2 (75' • DDD • T)

## Weill • Korngold • A Mahler • Zemlinsky

'Thousands of Miles'

Korngold Mond, so gehst du wieder auf A Mahler Hymne Weill Der Abschiedsbrief. Big Mole. Buddy on the Nightshift. Denn wie man sich bettet. Don't Look Now. Je ne t'aime pas. Lonely House. Nanna's Lied. Pirate Jenny/ Barbara Song. Trouble Man Zemlinsky Selige Stunde. Und hat der Tag all seine Qual

Kate Lindsey *mez* Baptiste Trotignon *pf*

Alpha © ALPHA272 (63' • DDD • T/T)



How do you sing Kurt Weill? There is, I suspect, ultimately no one answer. As Dagmar Pecková points out in a booklet note for her album, the malleability of his output, straddling classical, jazz and popular music, has attracted performers as far apart as Brigitte Fassbaender and Robbie Williams. Interpretation is consequently a matter of placing his music in an immense spectrum that embraces the *disease* approach of Lotte Lenya, the more classical manner pioneered, with Lenya's encouragement, by Teresa Stratas and the big-band swagger of Sinatra or, more recently, Michael Bublé. Pecková's 'Wanted' and Kate Lindsey's 'Thousands of Miles' take very different approaches.

Pecková anchors Weill in the cabaret tradition, while Lindsey, in a radical move, places him in the context of the European exile from Nazism by juxtaposing his work

with music by Korngold, Alma Mahler and Zemlinsky, fellow émigrés to the United States. Using arrangements by conductor Jan Kučera, Pecková has an orchestra and jazz instrumentalists at her disposal, along with baritone Jiří Hájek, who joins her for a handful of duets and is given a couple of songs on his own. It all sounds very 1950s dance-band, and you can't help thinking that Sinatra's and Bobby Darin's versions of 'Mack the Knife' have in places served as models. Lindsey's sole accompanist is jazz pianist Baptiste Trotignon, who has arranged Weill's songs himself, adding often dazzling improvisations to their basic melodic and rhythmic material.

Pecková, with her magnificent if frayed mezzo taking on a Lenya-ish touch of the gutter, proves a real drama queen. The passions of 'Surabaya Johnny' are extreme to the point of self-pity. 'Youkali' drips nostalgia, and Brecht's political invectives hit home throughout. In her rare forays into English, however, she doesn't sound ideally comfortable. 'I'm a stranger here myself' notably lacks the fire of the rest of it, and it is to Lindsey we must turn for the Broadway numbers, sung with wonderful understatement and great emotional perception. 'Trouble Man' and 'Lonely House' are high points on a disc where less frequently means so much more. We're reminded on occasion of Stratas, though Lindsey's stylistic range is wider, veering from classical grandeur in Alma Mahler's extravagant 'Hymne' to the *disease* growl she adopts for 'Denn wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.'

There are occasional drawbacks on both sides. Pecková's histrionics can result in the adoption of slow speeds for the sake of verbal clarity, and 'Seeräuber-Jenny' turns stately, though the ferocity with which she delivers the final stanza is remarkable. Lindsey, thinking of Weill's assimilation in America, offers the same song as 'Pirate Jenny' in Marc Blitzstein's English version, but turns it into a medley with the 'Barbara Song', in which neither, annoyingly, is given complete. Both discs ultimately compel admiration, though. Choice between them is impossible: if you like Weill, you'll probably like both. **Tim Ashley**

## Gundula Janowitz

'The Last Recital - in memoriam Maria Callas'

Schubert An die Leier, D737. Fischerweise, D881. Der Fluss, D693. Die Forelle, D550. Die Götter Griechenlands, D677. Im Abendrot, D799.

Iphigenia, D573. Das Lied im Grünen, D917. Der Lindenbaum, D911 No 5. Raste, Krieger! Krieg ist aus, D837 Schumann Myrthen, Op 25 - No 3, Der Nussbaum; No 7, Die Lotosblume; No 9, Lied der Suleika. Meine Rose, Op 90 No 2.

Schneeglöckchen, Op 79 No 26 R Strauss Allerseelen, Op 10 No 8. Befreit, Op 39 No 4. Morgen!, Op 27 No 4. Nachtgang, Op 29 No 3. Das Rosenband, Op 36 No 1

Gundula Janowitz *sop* Charles Spencer *pf*

First Hand © FHR56 (83' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herodes Atticus Odeon, Athens, September 16, 1999



Gundula Janowitz officially retired from the stage in 1990 and, according

to most accounts, gave occasional recitals until around the middle of that decade. It might come as a surprise, then, to find that her final recital actually dates from September 1999 – and that it was captured for posterity.

It's a wonderful surprise, too, since the singer (who recently turned 80) is in remarkably fresh voice throughout. There's a certain loss of bloom, inevitably, and an occasional brittleness of intonation, but the unique sound is unmistakable, the delivery still clear and confident. First Hand Records' remastering of the unofficial recording, captured outdoors in Athens's Herodes Atticus Odeon, is impressive too: a little reverberant, perhaps, with the sound of Charles Spencer's piano a touch clangorous, but beautifully balanced and direct – and with very little extraneous sound.

The programme has clearly been selected with the greatest care: here are songs with a certain valedictory potential that is brought out by the occasion as well as by an interpretative approach from Janowitz that is non-interventionist and leisurely. It's almost as if the singer herself is reluctant to let go, needing occasionally to be coaxed along by Spencer's robust piano-playing.

The opening line of Schiller's 'Die Götter Griechenlands', lamenting the passing of a world of beauty, seems doubly apt as a starting point; while few singers of any age today would be able to match the purity of tone and warmth Janowitz can still bring here to the opening of 'Der Fluss'. A highlight is a particularly moving performance of the substantial 'Raste, Krieger!' Only in a cautious-sounding 'Der Lindenbaum' does one detect a lack of firmness in the lower range, and there's some understandable tiredness – at the end of what I assume was the concert's first half – in 'Das Lied im Grünen'.

There's much to enjoy in the Schumann, but the second half is really all about the handful of Strauss songs, performed with wonderful breadth, serenity and integrity.



At this point the voice also finds new reserves of power and luminous tone. I can't imagine many dry eyes being left after 'Allerseelen', 'Morgen' or a tender 'Nachtgang' – but if there are, the final 'Befreit', managing to be simultaneously vulnerable and majestic, will surely put an end to that.

That song proves a hard act to follow, and FHR's need to squeeze over 82 minutes of music on to the disc means little time to recover before an encore, 'Die Forelle', in which the 63-year-old soprano suddenly sounds more fallible. A last-minute change in the programme also means that we have 'Das Rosenband' at the start of the Strauss selection rather than the listed 'Lob des Leidens'. Still, this is a remarkable document: a moving concert and an essential buy for any fans of this great singer. **Hugo Shirley**

## 'Like as the Hart'

'Music for The Templar's Garden'

**Buxtehude** Quemadmodum desiderat cervus  
**Handel** As pants the hart **Howells** Like as the hart  
**L'Estrange** As the chased hart **Ockeghem** Sicut cervus desiderat  
**Palestrina** Sicut cervus desiderat  
**Pitts** Why restless, why cast down?  
**Schütz** Quemadmodum desiderat cervus  
**Tallis** E'en like the hunted hind **Taverner** Quemadmodum desiderat cervus  
**Choir of New College, Oxford / Robert Quinney**  
Novum © NCR1392 (66' • DDD • T/t)



A collection of settings of Psalm 42 in various translations curated by Catherine Alette

Clover, author of New College-themed novel *The Templar's Garden* – not quite the return to this choir's vital and significant recording work (Bach, Pergolesi, Ludford, Blow) that I so sorely missed reviewing their 'favourite anthems' disc (8/17) but hey, you can't win them all ...

What you do get here is further evidence, as on the previous issue, of the choir's tightening blend and discipline under Robert Quinney, but also the concurrent preservation of its stringy, soloistic tone. That's why New College Choir has always suited Baroque music best and that's why the most successful pieces here are Handel's *As pants the hart* (variegated, full of expression, impressively taken solos, no sanded edges), Buxtehude's *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus* (ditto, but Baroque strings or bows would have been nice) and Schütz's setting of the same text. If Quinney were to tame his soloists' tendencies to slightly overblow

blossoming phrases and sustained notes, a Schütz recording from his choir could be fascinating.

He can control it, and so can they – as witness, in a different aesthetic, Howells's *Like as the hart*. The piece is sung brashly by the best choirs around. Quinney and his singers lend it the appropriate Fauré-like restraint, organist Joseph Laming shifts the colours deliciously on New College's clattering box of whistles without drawing attention to the fact, and the result is pure balm. Alexander L'Estrange's newly commissioned *As the chased hart* sounds like a bad pastiche of Howells improvised by an inebriated barbershop quartet. Antony Pitts's strophic *Why restless, why cast down?* is a fascinating neo-hymnic Rubik's cube of a piece, though it needs a more confident and shaded performance than it gets here.

**Andrew Mellor**

## 'Many are the Wonders'

'Renaissance Gems and Their Reflections - Vol 2, Tallis'

**Allain** Videte miraculum **K Andrew** Archbishop Parker's Psalme 150 **K Burton** Many are the wonders **Escott** O light of light **Ferko** Reflection on Thomas Tallis' If ye love me **Roth** Night Prayer **Stuckey** O sacrum convivium **Tallis** Canon (arr Chilcott). Come Holy Ghost. E'en like the hunted hind. Expend, O Lord, my plaint. God grant with grace. If ye love me. Let God arise. Loquebantur variis linguis. Man blest no doubt. O come in one to praise the Lord. O nata lux. O sacrum convivium. Te lucis ante terminum. Videte miraculum. Why brag'st in malice high. Why fum'th in fight (two versions)

**ORA / Suzi Digby**

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5284 (70' • DDD • T/t)



This is ORA's third release in less than 18 months – a breathless pace that

conductor-founder Suzi Digby plans to sustain for at least the choir's first five years. After an accomplished but rather anonymous debut ('Upheld By Stillness', 3/16), the choir's follow-up, 'Refuge from the Flames' (11/16), was a revelation – exciting, unusual repertoire performed with real flair and personality. 'Many are the Wonders' continues the group's philosophy of pairing Renaissance classics with new commissions, but does it also continue the upwards trend?

Yes and no. The singing itself is still immaculate – seamlessly blended through the voices, a halo of resonance surrounding a solid vocal core, keeping things from getting too fey and floaty. The structure

of paired motets – a Renaissance point of inspiration and a contemporary setting – also continues to work well, slipping over half an hour of world premieres into a disc that should still have broad appeal.

But the overall effect is of efficiency rather than rapture. The Tallis motets are tidily performed but lack the rhetorical care and clarity to eclipse existing recordings by the Oxford Camerata or The Sixteen. The five commissions mostly share a similar (and similarly safe) sound world. Somewhere between Pärt, Ešenvalds and the Anglican choral tradition, neither Harry Escott's *O light of light* nor Frank Ferko's *Reflection on Thomas Tallis' If ye love me* assert or risk much, and Alec Roth's *Night Prayer* sticks so close to its original (Tallis's *Te lucis ante terminum*) as to be more of a variation than anything else.

Much more successful are Kerry Andrew's robust, declamatory *Archbishop Parker's Psalme 150* – nodding to tradition without ever losing its own contemporary voice – and the cascading imitation of Richard Allain's *Videte miraculum*, an atmosphere-piece whose ingenuous, consonant simplicity trusts to performance to gild it into luminous beauty.

ORA's remains a worthy project but I'm once again left longing for the risk – both in repertoire and performance – that these musicians could offer to turn efficiency into inspiration. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## 'Occhi turchini'

Songs from Calabria

**Pino de Vittorio** *sngtr/chitarra battente/perc*

**Laboratorio '600 / Franco Pavan**

Glossa © GCDP33002 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Franco Pavan's recent forays into the exciting world of folk/early music

with Laboratorio '600 are stylish and exciting. His combination of poignant programming with crisp, exacting performances shows that he has a finger right on the pulse of current trends in musicology. This latest album, 'Occhi turchini', brings the ultra-expressive and colourful voice of Pino de Vittorio together with some fascinating research into various cultural influences on southern Italian music; the result is a selection of traditional Calabrian songs and instrumental works full of surprises.

The sources for this music are fascinating in themselves. A 16th-century collection entitled *Antiche Ariette Nazionali / Anche / De' Piu Remoti Paesi* ... provides two



Luminous beauty: ORA and their conductor-founder Suzi Digby blend Renaissance and contemporary settings

stunning instrumental pieces well suited to the versatile plucked strings of Laboratio '600: *Arietta grica* has an improvisatory feel and *La calabrese* is full of taut, energetic rhythms. One particularly atmospheric instrumental track, *Canzona a morto*, comes from Rocco Rossetti, one of the last Viggianese itinerant harpists, and showcases the exquisite playing of Flora Papadopoulos. In other cases, such as the title-track *Occhi turchini* ('Blue eyes'), songs have been sourced from field recordings. Pino de Vittorio is a gripping communicator, running a huge range of emotions in the folk material yet finding a devastating stillness when recounting Clorinda's death in Carlo Cusentino's 1731 Calabrian version of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, sung here to the tenor of the Romanesca.

Throughout this album I am reminded that when Alan Lomax embarked on his Italian recording project for Columbia Records he promised the broadcaster RAI that his work would inspire a folk-song revival. It is heartening, therefore, to see Lomax's recording of *Veni sonne de la muntagnella* cited as the source for Pino de Vittorio's haunting performance of the same song. Yet this disc is so much more than a revival, it is a celebration of Calabrian diversity and history.

Edward Breen

## 'Set Upon the Rood'

**Bick** Set Upon the Rood **Grier** Cantemus  
**J Kenny** The Deer's Cry **MacMillan** Noli Pater  
**MacRae** Cantata **B Taylor** Crux fidelis **Wishart**  
 Iste Confessor  
**Barnaby Brown** triplepipe/aulos **John Kenny**  
 Loughnashade hn/chimes **Patrick Kenny** carnyx/  
 chimes **Bill Taylor** lyre **James Leitch, Michael How**  
 org/crotales **Choir of Gonville & Caius College,**  
**Cambridge / Geoffrey Webber**  
 Delphian Ⓢ DCD34154 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Leaving other Oxbridge choirs to squabble over Tallis and Byrd, under director Geoffrey

Webber the Choir of Gonville & Caius College have ploughed an altogether more unusual musical furrow. Their latest release is an offshoot of Delphian's five-part series in conjunction with EMAP – the European Music Archaeology Project – pairing living composers with ancient instruments to conjure startling sound worlds the choir's founders could never have imagined.

What's most interesting about this collection of choral works by James MacMillan, John Kenny, Stevie Wishart, Francis Grier and more is the way these ancient instruments have encouraged composers to think in terms of sound

rather than music. These are works that celebrate texture in all its forms – from the whispered chatter, the spoken word and shimmer of crotales in Kenny's *The Deer's Cry*, the glinting of the wire-strung lute in MacRae's *Cantata* and the guttural grunt and buzz of the aulos (a new addition to the project's ancient instruments) in Stephen Bick's *Set Upon the Rood*.

Suddenly sound and music exist in a single sonic continuum and the effect is exhilarating – both ancient and fundamental but undeniably modern. The range of responses is striking. MacRae creates a more astringent, contemporary world, while Wishart's *Iste Confessor* (taken from her larger *Vespers for St Hildegard*) offers the composer's signature blend of medieval textures and modal melodies. Barnaby Brown's triplepipe adds menace and depth to the stormy imagery of MacMillan's *Noli Pater*, while both the carnyx (a curving wind instrument) and Loughnashade horn bring drama to Kenny's multi-movement cantata *The Deer's Cry*.

This is a disc that will leave you bewildered in the best possible way, assaulted and seduced by deeply unfamiliar sounds. While bewilderment can be good in a performance, it's unhelpful in a booklet, which offers far too little information about these unfamiliar instruments, their history and capacity. **Alexandra Coghlan**



# REISSUES

**Rob Cowan** celebrates an underrated American pianist and **Hugo Shirley** bids Gundula Janowitz a happy 80th birthday

## *A very classy pianist*

The pianist John Browning's reputation rests largely on his performances and recordings of the music of Samuel Barber who, in the mid-1950s, heard him tackle Rachmaninov under Mitropoulos and soon afterwards perform Barber's own Sonata, experiences that eventually lead to the creation of a compelling Piano Concerto that Browning played repeatedly, and recorded twice. Both of those versions are included in this admirable **The Complete RCA Album Collection**, the earlier and tighter of the two under George Szell, the later, marginally more relaxed version under Leonard Slatkin, and it's that technically superior recording where the opening of the lovely 'Canzone' second movement seems most to resemble music from Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. The same music isn't too far removed from the central *Andante assai* of Prokofiev's First Concerto – the whole of Browning's Prokofiev concerto cycle (previously reissued on CD by Testament and RCA themselves) is largely brilliant, deft, coolly elegant and energetic. In the case of the Third Concerto he and Leinsdorf had recorded the work in London a few years earlier with the Philharmonia (EMI), a conceptually similar performance though by RCA's standards Capitol's piano tone now sounds rather shallow. Jed Distler's excellent note tells us that Browning learned the other four concertos especially for the Leinsdorf/Boston Prokofiev series though you'd hardly guess from the evidence, at least not until you compare him with Krainev or Serkin in the Fourth Concerto, or Ashkenazy or Krainev in the Second, both players focusing the music's bolder, grittier and darker aspects rather more astutely than Browning does here.

Browning turns Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations into a gleaming Cadillac that knows no bounds as to where or how

swiftly it travels, except maybe along really rugged terrains that others locate and that call for something heavier and harder (Serkin, Richter-Haaser, Kovacevich). It's a controlled, intelligent, witty performance; dynamic contrasts abound and Browning's command of the closing fugue and cataclysmic arpeggios that follow it, not to mention the subsequent, hushed chords and the throwaway minuet finale, is beautifully judged. The opening movement of the A flat Sonata Op 110 is notable for its constantly shifting gradations of tone and colour, especially as we move towards the crest of the development section while Schumann's *Symphonic Studies* enjoy a performance that I can only describe as balletic, in essence buoyant and poetic though with plenty of muscle where needed.

Regarding the 'first-release' Debussy items (specific recording dates and locations are not known), the *Préludes* Book 2 are captured in good, albeit mono, sound. Browning sculpts each piece with a knowing ear, and his sense of musical timing, not to mention his weighting of chords, is impeccable, especially in 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune', while 'Ondine' anticipates sophisticated musical climes beyond Debussy's era and the more extroverted pieces such as 'Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq.', 'Les tierces alternées' and 'Feux d'artifice' show Browning's seemingly infallible technique to fine advantage.

The other newly released Debussy sequence, in stereo this time, is again mostly excellent, though the odd tiny imperfection – such as what sounds like a dropped note near the start of 'Mouvement' from *Images* Book 1 – suggests that these are unedited first takes. Also at 3'20" into 'Hommage à Rameau', a point where Debussy asks for heightened animation, surely Browning's impatient speeding rather spoils the mood. In Book 2 of *Images*, 'Pagodes' is very cleanly played



and yet if you want a vivid evocation of those tiered towers with multiple eaves, you need only to turn to Arrau (his earlier recording, now on Sony Classical), who paints the music with incomparable grandeur and finesse.

There are times when Browning's approach to written dynamics more suggests lip service than meticulous adherence to the score but there's still a great deal to admire. His Ravel recital is a joy, the Sonatine's Menuet poised and precise, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* featuring an immaculately tooled Toccata, *Gaspard de la nuit* stronger on drama than on atmosphere ('Scarbo' is stunning). Also included is a lyrical account of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Pinchas Zukerman and Ralph Kirshbaum under Christoph Eschenbach, *The Carnival of the Animals* with Garrick Ohlsson, Tchaikovsky's First Concerto under Ozawa (suave and extremely virtuoso), Barber's *Excursions* for piano duet (with Leonard Slatkin) and a couple of LP couplings not involving Browning at all, Weill's *Threepenny Opera* Suite under Leinsdorf and William Schuman's *A Song of Orpheus* with cellist Leonard Rose and Szell conducting.

If I were to sum up Browning's art with a single word it would be 'classy', and no recording in this set proves the point more convincingly than his polished and persuasive sets of Chopin Etudes, which serve as the perfect Browning calling card. You may nominate interpretations that you prefer, but surely very few that are better played. **Rob Cowan**

### THE RECORDING

**John Browning: The Complete RCA Album Collection**

RCA Red Seal © 12 8898 539503-2

# A voice of silver and gold

It's 11 years since DG last brought out a box set to commemorate Gundula Janowitz. Subtitled the 'The Golden Voice' (4/06), that was part of a series of releases celebrating a variety of the label's artists. Now, to celebrate the great soprano turning 80, we have **The Gundula Janowitz Edition**: 14 well-filled CDs, a luxurious booklet (crammed with some wonderful photos) and original sleeves.

The 'golden voice' becomes, to quote the title of Jürgen Kesting's generous and insightful appreciation in the booklet, 'a voice of silver and gold'. And looking through the box one is reminded how Janowitz's soprano – unmistakable and possessed of a crystalline beauty that manages to combine delicacy and steely focus – became indelibly entwined with the identity of the Yellow Label, not least as it was defined by its long association with her great champion, Herbert von Karajan.

Bigwigs at DG might be rueing the fact that the earlier box already contained a couple of firsts, though. That saw the re-release of Janowitz's early Archiv recording of the 85-year-old Telemann's *Ino* (dated but fascinating) and a couple of Mozart arias with John Pritchard. There was also a *Four Last Songs* recorded live with the Concertgebouw Orchestra under Bernard Haitink in 1968, some six years before the famous account with Karajan – a little swifter, a little leaner but every bit as moving. DG has at least kept one trick up its sleeve: a six-minute interview from 1969 (in German) in which the soprano speaks about a foundation she set up for young singers, as well as her own personal history with the *Figaro* Countess's 'Dove sono'.

Otherwise the first five discs are essentially the same as the five discs that made up 'The Golden Voice', with a few additions. There's an extra *Christmas Oratorio* duet to go alongside the Telemann and *Messiah* extracts (*auf Deutsch*) on Disc 2, for example; a ragbag Disc 5, featuring those live *Four Last Songs* and excerpts from her *Capriccio*, *Figaro* and *Carmina Burana*, now also includes her contributions to Claudio Abbado's recording of Mozart's *Waisenhaus* Mass, plus snippets of Mendelssohn's *Paulus* and an exquisite 'Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit' from the 1980 *German Requiem* with Haitink.

It's always worth revisiting her Mozart concert arias (already reissued under the DG Originals imprimatur), and I enjoyed the Beethoven Mass in C on Disc 3. But a particular highlight among these first discs is her luminous Weber and Wagner recital



Gundula Janowitz at a recording session with her mentor, the conductor Herbert von Karajan

from 1967 (with Ferdinand Leitner and the Deutsche Oper orchestra) – and it's difficult to resist the couplings: two numbers each from *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Waffenschmied*, plus a brief turn as a Flower Maiden in Knappertsbusch's 1962 Bayreuth *Parsifal*.

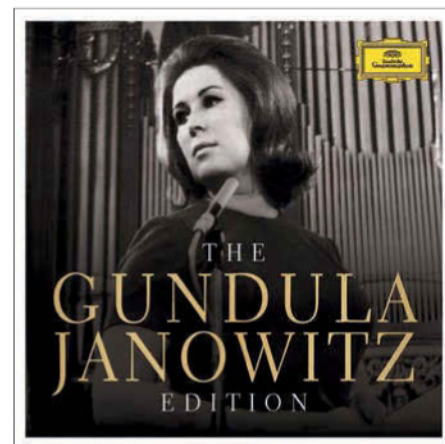
Nearly a third of the new box is taken up with her two sets of Schubert Lieder. Recorded in the late 1970s with Irwin Gage, they sound as fresh and beautiful as ever and offer some real dramatic intensity from a singer often accused of placidity – as a grandly tragic 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' testifies. The whole First Act of Karajan's *Walküre* showcases Janowitz's ardent, youthful Sieglinde, but otherwise the rest of the set remains somewhat diffuse, programming-wise. Disc 9, with Kubelík's *Lobengrin* on the cover, has just 35 minutes of that recording, alongside Agathe's arias from the Kleiber *Freischütz* and a couple of ruthlessly extracted chunks from Act 2 and 3 of *Die Walküre*. A disc with *Die Schöpfung* on the cover contains extracts of that work, *Die Jahreszeiten* and the 'Benedictus' from Karajan's *Missa solemnis*; *Fidelio* highlights are put together with extracts from *Così* and *Orfeo ed Euridice*. You only get to the *Four Last Songs* advertised on the cover of the final disc after bits not only of Karajan's stately B Minor Mass and *St Matthew Passion*, but also, somewhat incongruously, ten minutes of his *Götterdämmerung* featuring Janowitz as Gutrune.

It's nice to have each disc filled with extra goodies, of course, but it doesn't make the set easy to navigate. And, having decided

against complete works, it's a shame that DG couldn't have negotiated to include material from other sources: some of her Eva from Kubelík's BRSO *Meistersinger*, for example, the Diemut from the *Feuersnot* DG already licensed for its big centenary Strauss box, or even some audio-only extracts from her *Arabella* film with Solti.

What we do have, though, is still 14 CDs packed full of Janowitz's work for the label. The recordings vary in themselves, and the earlier music, in particular, has not dated terribly well given more recent trends. This box serves to remind us, though, that the voice itself is timeless. **Hugo Shirley**

► Gundula Janowitz's last recital, recorded live in Athens in 1999, and just released by First Hand Records, is reviewed on page 99



## THE RECORDING

### The Gundula Janowitz Edition

DG © 14 479 7348



# Opera



## Mark Pullinger on *The Golden Cockerel* from the Mariinsky:

*'It's all knockabout fun in a colourful production, even if it doesn't plumb any satirical depths'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 107**



## Hugo Shirley revisits Solti's all-star 1961 recording of *Aida*:

*'Solti's Aida is a brawny, Technicolor, sandals-and-sand epic presented in widescreen Decca engineering'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 110**

## Donizetti

### Rosmonda d'Inghilterra

Jessica Pratt *sop.*..... Rosmonda  
Dario Schmunck *ten.*..... Enrico  
Eva Mei *sop.*..... Leonora  
Nicola Ulivieri *bass*..... Clifford  
Raffaella Lupinacci *mez.*..... Arturo  
Chorus and Orchestra Donizetti Opera / Sebastiano Rolli

Stage director **Paolo Rota**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic (F) ② CDS7757; (F) ② **DVD** 37757;  
(F) ② 57757 (151' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •  
DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)  
Recorded live at Teatro Donizetti, Bergamo,  
November 2016  
Includes synopsis



There are plenty of Donizetti rarities for enterprising opera companies and record labels to choose from:

*Emilia di Liverpool*, *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*, *Boris conte di Henley*. All right, I may have made one of those up, but Gaetano certainly covered a lot of British history and geography in his operatic adventures. *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* (1834) is based on the legend of Rosamund Clifford, Henry II's mistress (although she is unaware of his royal status at the time). The king (Enrico) keeps his mistress tucked away near Woodstock Castle, and Donizetti's opera, based on a pre-existing libretto by Felice Romani, focuses on what happens when Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (Leonora) discovers and challenges her rival. Although based on historical characters, the plot isn't remotely true, with little suggestion that Eleanor was directly responsible for Rosamund's death – Romani and Donizetti have her wielding the knife. The opera was revived last autumn by the Fondazione Donizetti in the composer's hometown of Bergamo, recorded for release on both CD and DVD.

The first thing to note is that Donizetti's music is full of very good tunes, if not as

consistently inspired as *Lucrezia Borgia*, composed a few months earlier, or *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which followed within two years. The title-role requires a soprano with all the coloratura agility of a Lucia. Indeed, the original Rosmonda was Fanny Tacchinardi Persiani, who went on to create the role of Lucia, and Rosmonda's 'Perchè non ho del vento' was even substituted for the cavatina 'Regnava nel silenzio cavatina' when Donizetti made his French version of *Lucia* for Paris. Jessica Pratt is technically proficient with blazing tone, plus superbly controlled trills and ornamentations. Although her soprano isn't always appealing on the ear, there are plenty of exciting interpolated high notes. Renée Fleming is in surer voice for Opera Rara, although she takes the Act 1 aria and cabaletta down a tone, unlike Pratt, who is happier in the *bel canto* stratosphere.

Eva Mei is a cool, steely Leonora, nearly a match for Nelly Miricioiu, but Dario Schmunck's Enrico (a role written for the great Gilbert Duprez) is ungainly and effortful. Bruce Ford is far preferable. Nicola Ulivieri is a reliable Clifford.

Paola Rota's production is sparse, simply a pair of sliding walls each containing a door frame to enable entrances, exits and eavesdropping opportunities. Costuming is traditional apart from the bizarre green and gold face-paints with a strip of dark eye make-up on some characters, which brings to mind Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Sebastiano Rolli conducts a breezy account of what is billed as a new critical edition by Alberto Sonzogno, based on the original score. Therefore there is no revised ending, as recorded by Opera Rara, in which Leonora gets a grand cabaletta. Here, the opera just peters out into an uncertain silence as Rosmonda dies. Given the rudimentary production values, it's probably preferable to opt for the CD version. If your budget runs to it, though, Opera Rara's *Rosmonda* still rules the *bel canto* roost. **Mark Pullinger**

Comparative version:

Parry (2/97) (OPRA) ORC13

## Handel

### Ottone, re di Germania

Max Emanuel Cencic *counterten.*..... Ottone  
Lauren Snouffer *sop.*..... Teofane  
Pavel Kudinov *bass-bar.*..... Emireno  
Ann Hallenberg *mez.*..... Gismonda  
Xavier Sabata *counterten.*..... Adelberto  
Anna Starushkevych *mez.*..... Matilda  
Il Pomo d'Oro / George Petrou  
Decca (M) ③ 483 1814DHO3 (3h 23' • DDD)  
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Premiered at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, in January 1723, *Ottone* was the

first Handel opera to pair his star draws of the 1720s: the soprano Francesca Cuzzoni, making her London debut as Teofane, and the castrato Senesino in the title-role. Both were singers with attitude. But they met their match in Handel, who reputedly threatened to throw Cuzzoni out of the window until she agreed to quell her prima donna's vanity and sing Teofane's simple and touching opening aria 'Falsa imagine'. Ironically, the aria made Cuzzoni's London reputation as a soprano without equal in the 'pathetic' style. Centring on the attempts of the scheming matriarch Gismonda and her unlovely son Adelberto to prevent King Ottone from marrying the Byzantine Princess Teofane and assuming his rightful throne, *Ottone's* pseudo-historical libretto is often hopelessly confused. This evidently mattered not a jot to Handel's audiences. The combination of Senesino, Cuzzoni and Handel's melodic fertility (Charles Burney reported that many of the arias soon became 'national favourites') made *Ottone* an instant success. With a total of 36 performances over five seasons, it was eclipsed in popularity only by *Rinaldo* during his lifetime.

These days *Ottone* ranks well down the Handel pecking order, not least because of the plot's muddles and absurdities. On CD, though, it has fared relatively well, with two period-instrument versions appearing



Emphatically the version to have: Max Emanuel Cencic stars as Handel's Ottone

in quick succession from Nicholas McGegan (Harmonia Mundi, 3/93) and Robert King (Hyperion, 7/93). Both do the opera fair justice. But this new version, recorded in the sympathetic acoustic of the Villa San Fermo in the Veneto, easily surpasses them in consistency of casting and dramatic flair. Without pressing the tempos unduly (except when dancing on hot coals in the Overture's fugue), George Petrou draws rhythmically animated, sensitively coloured playing from the crack Italian band. Abetted by an alert, unfussy continuo, recitatives are lively and naturally paced, though not even Petrou and his singers can save the final denouement from blink-and-you-miss-it perfunctoriness.

The cast is uniformly strong. Ottone is more mooning lover than strutting hero, always ready to buckle in a crisis. But Max Emanuel Cencic, with his unusually powerful, sensuous countertenor, rescues him from self-regarding wimpishness. He sings his tender opening siciliano and Act 3 lament 'Dove sei?' with intense beauty of line and tone, always responsive to the text, and throws off his bravura arias with unforced brilliance. As the patiently suffering (even by Baroque opera standards) heroine, the American soprano Lauren Snouffer has a warmer, richer voice

than either of her CD rivals and a nimble coloratura technique. With a mezzo glint in her tone, she catches well the passionate undercurrents of Teofane's music, whether in 'Falsa imagine', her yearning plea for peace 'Affanni dei pensier' or the nocturnal garden scena in Act 3. Some may find her quick vibrato slightly disconcerting in Handel, though I soon got used to it.

Gismonda's inconsistently drawn character, veering between ruthless ambition and blithe exuberance, is softened by the lulling 'Vieni, o figlio', an exquisite outpouring of maternal love. Ann Hallenberg, always a superb Handelian, sings this with musing inwardness, using delicate ornamentation to enhance the intensity of the *da capo*. Elsewhere she musters all the imperiousness and, in the splenetic 'Trema, tiranno', venom that the matriarch's music demands. In the role of Matilda, in love with the contemptible Adelberto in spite of herself, mezzo Anna Starushkevych sings with sensitivity and (in her fiery denunciation of Ottone) plenty of temperament, though her coloratura can be bumpy. Xavier Sabata, as Adelberto, is mellifluous in his quieter, lyrical music but tends to hoot when spitting out defiance in 'Tu puoi straziarmi'. Eschewing mere bluster, bass-baritone Pavel Kudinov sings

with fine, clean resonance and impressive agility – a hint of tenderness, too, in his final aria – as the jolly pirate Emireno, who eventually turns out to be Teofane's brother in disguise (don't question the maths – this is *opera seria*).

Despite minor provisos, this new recording is emphatically the version to have of an opera whose dramatic flaws are redeemed by magnificent individual scenes and any number of good tunes. It is also more complete than its rivals, including, as David Vickers explains in an informative note, all the music heard at the 1723 premiere plus two new arias added for Cuzzoni's benefit night later that season and, as an appendix, three numbers Handel composed for Senesino when he revived *Ottone* in 1726. **Richard Wigmore**

## Monteverdi

DVD

'3x Poppea'

**L'incoronazione di Poppea**

**Birgitte Christensen** *sop*..... Poppea

**Jacek Laszczkowski** *ten*..... Nerone

**Tim Mead** *counterten*..... Ottone

**Orchestra of the Norwegian National Opera / Alessandro de Marchi**

*Stage director* **Ole Anders Tandberg**

*Video directors* **Anja Stabell, Stein-Roger Bull**

Recorded 2010



**L'incoronazione di Poppea**

**Patricia Schuman** *sop* ..... Poppea  
**Richard Croft** *ten* ..... Nerone  
**Jeffrey Gall** *counterten* ..... Ottone

**Concerto Köln / René Jacobs**

*Stage director* **Michael Hampe**

*Video director* **José Montes-Baquer**

Recorded at the Schwetzingen SWR Festival, 1993

**L'incoronazione di Poppea****Gauthier Dance**

*Choreographer* **Christian Spuck**

*Video director* **Nikolai Vialkowsitch**

Recorded at Theaterhaus Stuttgart, July 2013

EuroArts (M) ③ DVD 205 6318 (6h 49' • NTSC • 16:9/4:3 • DTS5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Includes synopsis

**L'incoronazione di Poppea**

has always been the subject of revisionist fascination. The first modern performance, directed by Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum in Paris in 1905, was sung in French, and the heavily cut music was extensively recomposed – d'Indy proclaimed that 'it has been my intention to produce a work of art, not of archaeology'. This kind of attitude to creativity has prevailed in plenty of interventionist reinventions of *Poppea*, three of which are contained within EuroArts' triple-whammy DVD collection.

René Jacobs's liberal composition of an orchestral 'realisation' is intrusive tinkering on a par with Leppard and Harnoncourt before him but Michael Hampe's sparse staging (Schwetzingen, 1993) is an intelligently taut drama that delineates the plot and characters with admirable clarity. Set atop a globe of the world, simple props are used sparingly and to concentrated effect (the knife presented to Harry Peeters's dignified Seneca and a throne and crown crop up as required). Nerone is transposed down an octave for tenor Richard Croft, whose performance is imperious, ardent and devious; the clash between the selfish emperor and his philosophical tutor's unwelcome wise counsel has vivid confrontational tension. Patricia Schuman's manipulative Poppea, Kathleen Kuhlmann's icy Ottavia and Darla Brook's courageous Drusilla are all a good fit for their characters; only Jeffrey Gall's pallid Ottone is underwhelming.

Alessandro de Marchi uses similar techniques to Jacobs for Norwegian National Opera (2010) but, apart from a couple of dashes of percussion-adorned flamenco and one particularly kitsch

mutation into cocktail-lounge jazziness, he tends to let continuo-based accompaniments speak more naturally for themselves. Ole Anders Tandberg's gratuitous production is filmed by Anja Stabell and Stein-Roger Bull in monochrome with splashes of red (such as lips and truckloads of blood), and the initially gorgeous stylisation becomes repulsively degenerate from Seneca's suicide onwards. Act 3 is subverted into a chain of gory murders and suicides that leaves the stage strewn with the bodies of almost every character except Nerone and Poppea, whose final duet is a frenzied orgy in the blood of their victims. The production is fundamentally risible, although I admired Tim Mead's nuanced Ottone, Patricia Bardon's deranged Ottavia and Marita Sølberg's complex Drusilla.

The Gauthier Dance Company (Stuttgart's Theaterhaus, 2013) convey a unique vision of how the plot of an opera can inspire dramatic reinvention but with barely a note of the problematic score being heard. An MC gives a spoken introduction to the main characters and events of the story, and thereafter the dancers explore the emotional and psychological tangents of the characters' motivations on a symbolic level (although a linear treatment of the plot emerges towards the end). Dressed almost entirely in black and dancing in a simple studio setting with only a few props, the dancers scream in unison from time to time, the MC repeats or mimes fragments of her introduction sporadically and at times Christian Spuck's extraordinary choreography strays awkwardly close to a satirical send-up of interpretative dance. Sound installation artist Martin Donner is the unseen DJ, whose soundtrack is a mash-up of Schumann, Icelandic pop star Emiliana Torrini, American singer-songwriter Cat Power and Geminiani's orchestration of Corelli's variations on *La folia*; Monteverdi is represented via fragmentary, scratched and remixed ambient treatments of different works: the duet from *Tirsi e Clori* illustrates the seductive Poppea's dancing with the infatuated Nerone; 'Si dolce è 'l tormento' provides an unexpectedly profound portrayal of Ottavia's shameful exile. It is difficult to watch the most neurotic convolutions with a straight face, but the creative reinvention of an opera with barely any of its actual music or libretto until the final scene (a remix of 'Pur ti miro') testifies to the enduring fascination artists have for Monteverdi's last opera.

**David Vickers**

**Pfitzner****Die Rose vom Liebesgarten**

**Erin Caves** *ten* ..... Siegnot

**Kouta Räsänen** *bass* ..... Der Waffenmeister/Der Nacht-Wunderer

..... Der Sangesmeister

**Andreas Kindschuh** *bar* ..... Minneleide

**Astrid Weber** *sop* ..... Schwarzhilde

**Jana Büchner** *sop* ..... Rotelse

**Tiina Penttinen** *mez* ..... Der Moormann

**André Riemer** *ten* ..... Der Moormann

**Chorus and Children's Chorus of Chemnitz**

**Opera; Robert-Schumann-Philharmonie /**

**Frank Beermann**

CPO (F) ③ CPO777 500-2 (165' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



If you've ever wondered why Hans Pfitzner failed to win the hand of Alma

Schindler and wound up instead with Percy Grainger's cast-off Mimi Kwast, drop the needle in Act 1 of the former composer's 1901 opera *Die Rose von Liebesgarten*, when the hero Siegnot woos the Queen of the Woods, Minneleide. It is a long time since I heard anything so charmless.

Critics at the opera's first performance in 1905 (facilitated and conducted by Mahler) liked the music but thought the libretto by Pfitzner's university chum James Grun, to a scenario by the composer himself, laughable. Age hasn't done it any favours. In truth, Pfitzner's story (knight arrives in mysterious garden; knight sets out to find love; knight is destroyed by evil spells; knight is resurrected and reunited with his bride) isn't a million miles away from *Lohengrin* with its fairy-tale and redemptive elements. So why does *Der Rose von Liebesgarten* prompt giggles instead of tears?

Most obviously because this was the 20th century. More importantly because Pfitzner is straitjacketed by his own diligent mindset. *Die Rose von Liebesgarten* doesn't get down on its hands and knees like Humperdinck's wonderful *Königskinder* (a comparable work in some ways), and, in the other direction, it doesn't get close to the exaltation of any mature Wagner. That sense of mist and mystery in its near contemporary, Debussy's *Pelléas*, is also missing. This isn't just about ability or the aforementioned 'charm'; it's about understanding theatrical principles and explains why the composer had far more success with the drier subject matter of *Palestrina*.

In *Die Rose*, we have a great deal of inaction and monologue. The latter are often long and ponderous, but occasionally the music rises up (it never really 'bubbles'



Slightly bonkers: the Mariinsky's production of Rimsky's *The Golden Cockerel* emphasises its surreal, fairy-tale aspects

up) into climaxes that have varying degrees of transitional and theatrical conviction. Sadly, the final climax for the reunited lovers doesn't deliver the goods regardless of which particular goods you're after. There are some fascinating orchestral and harmonic effects, as noted by all three leading members of the Second Viennese School, who apparently discussed and quoted Pfitzner's *Prelude*. Outside the confines of that opener and the various interludes, such effects can feel awkward.

Tremendous admiration for the musicians responsible for bringing all the 165 minutes of this until-now unavailable piece to the record shelves. Best of the singers is Erin Caves as Siegnot, whose sound Heldentenor credentials only serve to underline Pfitzner's stylistic frustrations 'after Wagner'. Astrid Weber as Minneleide has bags of vocal presence and a largely attractive dramatic soprano but is prone to bluster, particularly at the ends of phrases. Kouta Räsänen as the Master at Arms and the Night Sorcerer sings with moving nobility. The choirs can lack presence in the sound picture and the orchestra's string tone is sometimes thin. Frank Beermann marshals his forces as effectively as can be expected. Proceed on a need-to-hear basis. **Andrew Mellor**

## Rimsky-Korsakov

### The Golden Cockerel

**Vladimir Feliauer** *bass-bar* ..... King Dodon  
**Andrei Ilyushnikov** *ten* ..... Prince Guidon  
**Vladislav Sulimsky** *bar* ..... Prince Afron  
**Andrei Serov** *bass-bar* ..... Commander Polkan  
**Elena Vitman** *mez* ..... Amelfa  
**Andrei Popov** *ten* ..... Astrologer  
**Aida Garifullina** *sop* ..... Queen of Shemakha  
**Kira Loginova** *sop* ..... Golden Cockerel  
**Mariinsky Chorus and Orchestra / Valery Gergiev**

Stage and video director **Anna Matison**

Mariinsky © 2 (DVD + Blu-ray) MAR0596 (119' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • 24 bit 48kHz & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, December 27, 2014

Includes synopsis



Valery Gergiev's Kirov recordings of Rimsky-Korsakov operas for Philips in the 1990s did much to restore the composer's reputation internationally as a serious operatic force. It's a great shame that the series stalled, as it had yet to cover some of the most colourful works – *The Golden Cockerel*, *Tsar Saltan* and *The Snow Maiden*. The Mariinsky Theatre programmes Rimsky regularly – six of his

operas are scheduled for next season – and in December 2014 it unveiled this slightly bonkers new production by Anna Matison of *The Golden Cockerel*, filmed two days after the Christmas Day premiere.

Matison emphasises the surreal, fairy-tale aspects of the opera rather than any elements of political satire. A girl with a chicken-headed backpack – a tourist taking selfies – prises apart a gigantic jewel box to reveal Dodon's court, the cartoonish tsar and his sons wearing oversize onion-domed crowns, like St Basil's Cathedral. The girl becomes the cockerel, presented to Dodon by Andrei Popov's snakeskin-jacketed Astrologer to watch out for enemy danger. CGI projections reign supreme, with a coiling serpent matching the sinuous clarinet solo in the introduction.

In Act 2 things get weird. Swathed in dry ice, we are in a fantasy land where flower maidens attend the Queen of Shemakha – Aida Garifullina, skimpily clad and with long blond tresses. Dodon's sons have slain each other, their onion-dome crowns all that remain of them. A psychedelic kaleidoscope on a giant screen is as nothing though to the dizzying effect of much of the footage being filmed in close-up on the Mariinsky II stage, obviously shot later and lip-synched (not terribly well). Matison





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## Birmingham International Piano Festival 27 Oct – 4 Nov 2017

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<b>27 October</b>	<b>1.10pm</b>	<b>Kenneth Hamilton</b> piano
<b>27 October</b>	<b>7.30pm</b>	<b>Syd Lawrence Orchestra</b>
<b>28 October</b>	<b>7.30pm</b>	<b>European Union Chamber Orchestra</b> with Steven Devine harpsichord
<b>1 November</b>	<b>7.30pm</b>	<b>Benjamin Grosvenor</b> piano
<b>3 November</b>	<b>1.10pm</b>	<b>Ksenija Sidorova</b> accordion
<b>4 November</b>	<b>2pm</b>	<b>Songs About Us</b> family concert

Admission: Free - £22. See website for details.

Tickets + Info

[birminghampianofestival.com](http://birminghampianofestival.com)

starts to develop an interesting departure from the original plot here in that Dodon's general, Polkan, is clearly attracted to Shemakha, who seems to return his affections, but is left abandoned at the end, the queen escorted by Dodon back to his kingdom. In the short final act, Shemakha forces Dodon to slay the Astrologer when he dares to ask for her hand as his reward. The cockerel then throws her backpack and topples Dodon's crown to kill him. It's all knockabout fun in a colourful production, even if Matison doesn't plumb any great satirical depths.

Vocally, this would make an excellent audio-only recording were it not for one fatal flaw. The tenor role of the Astrologer lies perilously high and Andrei Popov just doesn't possess the stratospheric notes that Barry Banks pings out so easily on the 2002 Châtelet/Kent Nagano production on ArtHaus – a kabuki-inspired staging by Ennosuke Ichikawa that still looks very handsome. Otherwise, this release boasts a decent cast, led by Vladimir Feliauer's sturdy Dodon and Aida Garifullina's seductive Shemakha, bell-like in tone. Gergiev and his Mariinsky forces could play this score in their sleep but give an alert, punchy reading. You get a choice of medium, with both DVD and Blu-ray discs included. A qualified recommendation if you already own the ArtHaus DVD; but if you want to explore Rimsky's exotic score, this is as good a place as any to start.

**Mark Pullinger**

*Selected comparison:*

Nagano (ARTH) DVD 107 387; 108 053

## Rossini

### Adelaide di Borgogna

**Ekaterina Sadvonnikova** *sop* ..... Adelaide  
**Margarita Gritskova** *mez* ..... Ottone  
**Gheorghe Vlad** *ten* ..... Adelberto  
**Baurzhan Anderzhanov** *bass-bar* ..... Berengario  
**Miriam Zubieta** *sop* ..... Eurice  
**Cornelius Lewenberg** *bar* ..... Ernesto  
**Yasushi Watanabe** *ten* ..... Iroldo  
**Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań; Virtuosi Brunensis / Luciano Acocella**

Naxos (M) 2 8 660401/2 (123' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 19, 23 & 25, 2014

Includes synopsis; libretto available from [naxos.com](http://naxos.com)



*Adelaide di Borgogna*, staged in Rome in December 1817, comes between Rossini's *Armida* and *Mosè in Egitto*. The setting is Italy, supposedly on

Lake Garda, in the middle of the 10th century. Adelaide is held in a castle by Berengario, the murderer of her husband King Lotario. She rejects the advances of Adelberto, Berengario's son, who proposes to share the throne with her. Rescue comes in the shape of Ottone, the German Emperor Otto I who, instantly smitten, offers marriage. Before the ceremony can take place, the Germans are ambushed by Berengario's men. Ottone escapes; Adelberto renews his wooing of Adelaide, but news comes that the situation has been reversed and Berengario is now a prisoner. Adelberto is torn between his feelings for Adelaide and his duty as a son, but Berengario rejects the proposed exchange of prisoners. After further complications and a decisive battle, Ottone triumphantly assumes both the throne of Italy and the hand of Adelaide.

Rossini wrote the opera in a hurry, and it seems that the arias for Berengario and his wife Eurice, as well as the *secco* recitatives, were composed by others. Some of the music will have been familiar to the audiences at the Teatro Argentina. *Il barbiere di Siviglia* had been premiered there the previous year: not only did the chorus welcoming Ottone draw on the imbroglio following Doctor Bartolo's unmasking of 'Don Alonso', but most of Adelaide's 'Cingi la benda candida' came from Almaguira's 'Cessa di più resistere'. As the villain of the piece, Berengario is underdrawn: the important characters are Ottone, Adelberto and Adelaide herself.

Ottone is a trouser role: in 'Soffri la tua sventura' he engages in a dialogue with a solo cor anglais. Margarita Gritskova makes a strong impression both here and in the duets with Adelberto and Adelaide. As Adelberto, Gheorghe Vlad comes across as a bit pallid: he does well in the coloratura of 'Grida, o natura', but you need the personality of a Juan Diego Flórez or Luigi Alva. Ekaterina Sadvonnikova is touching in Adelaide's lamenting cavatina; she blends well with Gritskova and crowns her last aria with a joyous cabaletta.

Luciano Acocella gets some lively singing and playing from his Polish chorus and Czech orchestra. The booklet – synopsis, no libretto – refers to a concert performance in Edinburgh but curiously doesn't mention the ensuing Opera Rara recording. I haven't heard it but it was enthusiastically reviewed by Rossini expert Richard Osborne (3/07) and it includes libretto and translation.

**Richard Lawrence**

## Rossini

### Sigismondo

**Margarita Gritskova** *mez* ..... Sigismondo  
**Maria Aleida** *sop* ..... Aldimira  
**Kenneth Tarver** *ten* ..... Ladislao  
**Marcell Bakonyi** *bass* ..... Ulderico/Zenovito  
**Paula Sánchez-Valverde** *sop* ..... Anagilda  
**César Arrieta** *ten* ..... Radoski

**Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań;**

**Virtuosi Brunensis / Antonino Fogliani**

Naxos (M) 2 8 660403/4 (149' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 14, 16 & 24, 2016

Includes synopsis; Italian libretto available from [naxos.com](http://naxos.com)



As an old man, Rossini remembered with gratitude the audience who attended the first

performance of *Sigismondo* in Venice's La Fenice theatre on December 26, 1814. 'They were bored rigid and were clearly eager to vent their displeasure. But they stayed, remained quiet, and allowed the music to continue. That kindness touched me deeply.'

The theatre had warned Rossini that the libretto was unlikely to set his pulses racing. The plot concerns Sigismondo, King of Poland, who has jettisoned his wife at the behest of a rancorous first minister, himself a frustrated admirer of the exiled queen. It's the kind of plot archetype we find in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* with Hermione's expulsion and mysterious return. Sadly there's nothing remotely Shakespearean about Giuseppe Foppa's libretto.

It's interesting, nonetheless, that the principal characters spend much of their time in (or perilously close to) a state of nervous breakdown. It explains the slightly off-the-wall quality of much of the music, a quality that earlier in 1814 had found near-perfect expression in Rossini's Pirandello-like jest *Il turco in Italia*.

For a modern audience to tolerate *Sigismondo* as the Venetians did, you need a performance of style and imagination whose roots are set firmly in the soil of the *bel canto* tradition from which the opera derives. With its entirely non-Italian cast, this live 2016 Rossini in Wildbad recording can't quite provide that. The Cuban-born American soprano Maria Aleida, who sings the role of the exiled queen, seems well versed in the *bel canto* style. Too often, though, what we have here is the rough-and-ready feel of performers making what they can of the work's eccentric charms.

Superior by far is a 1992 Rovigo festival recording on which Richard Bonyng leads



an all-Italian cast, headed by Bruno Lazzaretti, Rossella Ragatzu and the young Sonia Ganassi. With Bonyngé in charge, the performance has precisely the kind of breeding and sense of musical style the work requires.

The Bongiovanni set is also better presented. The live recording has a refined studio-like quality to it, with applause confined to the ends of acts. And the booklet comes with a complete text and English translation – not so much a bonus, more a necessity in a rarity such as this.

**Richard Osborne**

*Selected comparison:*

*Bonyngé (BONG) GB2131/2*

## Verdi



### Aida

**Leontyne Price** *sop*.....Aida  
**Jon Vickers** *ten*.....Radamès  
**Rita Gorr** *mez*.....Amneris  
**Robert Merrill** *bar*.....Amonasro  
**Giorgio Tozzi** *bass*.....Ramfis  
**Plinio Clabassi** *bass*.....King of Egypt

**Chorus and Orchestra of Rome Opera /**

**Sir Georg Solti**

Decca ® ③ ② + 483 1490DHO3 (152' • ADD •

Dolby TrueHD 24-bit 96kHz & LPCM stereo)

From RCA originals (7/62)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



It's interesting to listen to this *Aida* again after the arrival in 2015 of

Warner Classics' new studio recording under Antonio Pappano. Both hail from the Italian capital and both are conducted by music directors of the Royal Opera: Pappano's with the Accademia di Santa Cecilia orchestra and chorus some 13 years into his reign; Solti's, originally issued on RCA, recorded with Rome Opera forces in the summer of 1961, the year he took over the top job at Covent Garden.

Pappano is hardly undramatic, but with him it's also a story of refinement, of finding the details of the score – closer to Karajan's 1959 Decca recording with the Vienna Philharmonic. With Solti, perhaps unsurprisingly, it's a tale primarily of visceral theatre: his is a brawny, Technicolor, sandals-and-sand epic presented in widescreen Decca engineering. The conducting bristles with energy and is constantly alive. He captures expertly the opera's grandeur, giving impressive weight to its moments of pomp and splendour. Subtlety is not high among his priorities, and there are hints of brashness and impatience at times, but it's an irresistibly exciting reading.

Newly remastered for this lavish hardback-booklet reissue, the recorded sound feels a little mellower than on previous reincarnations. It is particularly vivid in Blu-ray audio format but even there retains a certain period brittleness and rawness, as well as edits – tiny shifts in acoustic and colour – that one now hears more clearly. The winds are reedy and the strings have plenty of bite and definition. The brass sound wonderfully raucous – listen to the trumpets at the end of the Judgement scene – but, placed at the extremes of the wide sound stage, are allowed to be all-engulfing rather too often. The balance also positions the singers further back than we're used to, robbing them of some immediacy.

But Solti does have at his disposal some of the great voices of the early stereo era. Leontyne Price, Jon Vickers and Rita Gorr were already celebrated exponents of their roles and it shows in the dramatic immediacy they bring to them. Price is on gloriously regal form, fresh and exciting, while Vickers is in thrilling voice – once he warms up. Gorr presents a magnificently sung and imperious Amneris, which only gets better as the drama progresses. Robert Merrill is a stalwart Amonasro, Giorgio Tozzi a resonant Ramfis. The only disappointment is perhaps Plinio Clabassi's small-scale King, but that hardly matters.

If you like your *Aida* a little rough-and-ready, thrillingly sung and played with plenty of raw energy, then you won't be disappointed by this luxurious reissue.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparison:*

*Pappano (A/15) (WARN) 2564 61066-3*

## Verdi



### Il trovatore

**Raina Kabaivanska** *sop*.....Leonora  
**Plácido Domingo** *ten*.....Manrico  
**Piero Cappuccilli** *bar*.....Count di Luna  
**Fiorenza Cossotto** *mez*.....Azucena  
**José van Dam** *bass-bar*.....Ferrando  
**Maria Venuti** *mez*.....Ines

**Chorus and Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera /**

**Herbert von Karajan**

*Stage director* **Herbert von Karajan**

*Video director* **Günther Schneider-Siemssen**

ArtHaus Musik ® DVD 109 334 (151' • NTSC • 4:3 •

DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, 1978



*Il trovatore*, a brief note accompanying this reissue from the Vienna Staatsoper in 1978 reminds us, was one

of Karajan's favourite operas, and one he conducted repeatedly throughout his long career. On disc his interpretation is preserved on two studio recordings (the first, from 1956, with Callas as Leonore – Warner, 11/57), as well as multiple live sets, including an 'official' one taped at the unveiling of his own 1962 Salzburg production with Leontyne Price, Franco Corelli, Ettore Bastianini and Giulietta Simionato (Opera d'Oro).

That production forms the basis for what we see here from Vienna. A grandly Impressionistic but undeniably fusty affair, it was filmed by Günther Schneider-Siemssen a year after it had been used for Karajan's triumphant return to the theatre he'd resigned from 13 years previously. It's more than a standard TV broadcast, though, featuring lots of bold close-ups and a few (dated) special effects – Karajan was at the time switching to filming live performances of operas rather than producing exorbitantly expensive studio films.

The direction of the principals is minimal, with them manoeuvred into tableaux and left there – having already drawn his sword at the start of 'Di quella pira' (given down a semitone), for example, Plácido Domingo's Manrico can do nothing but wave it around inconsequentially for the rest of the aria. The under-directed chorus don't always bear the scrutiny of the camera, either.

Arguably, though, the direction reflects Karajan's view of the piece as a distillation of human emotions, a kind of Verdian equivalent to *Così fan tutte*'s emotional laboratory. It brings the focus fully on to the principals, whose acting I find compelling in its unity, unapologetic melodrama and fiery, earnest conviction. The singing, too, is magnificent. José van Dam is a superbly suave and powerful Ferrando. Piero Cappuccilli's Luna is near ideal, elegant and forthright. Raina Kabaivanska presents a noble and impeccably stylish Leonore. It's a finely focused voice that tightens a little at the top, but hers is a classy, moving performance.

Top honours perhaps go to Domingo and Fiorenza Cossotto. Cossotto's Azucena warms up after 'Stride la vampa' into a thrillingly vivid portrayal, majestic vocally and gloriously, irresistibly over-the-top dramatically. Domingo famously had to step in after the original tenor, Franco Bonisolli, lost his temper at a dress rehearsal and threw his sword at Karajan. His Manrico is superb, though, sung in long phrases with shining golden tone and ringing top notes, and played with youthful panache and impetuosity.



A reissued *Aida*: Sir Georg Solti had some of the great voices of the early stereo era at his disposal

Karajan's conducting is full of fire, too, and the score is terrifically well played by the orchestra. The endless curtain calls might pall on repeated viewings, and ArtHaus hasn't put much effort into the reissue. No matter: this is an old-fashioned, no-holds-barred Verdian treat. **Hugo Shirley**

### 'Russian Light'

**Glinka** *Ruslan and Lyudmila* - Lyudmila's Cavatina  
**Rachmaninov** Don't sing, my beauty, Op 4 No 4.  
 Spring Waters, Op 14 No 1. It's nice here, Op 21  
 No 7. Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **Rimsky-Korsakov** The  
 Golden Cockerel - Hymn to the Sun. Sadko -  
 Volkhova's Lullaby. The Snow Maiden - Snow  
 Maiden's Aria. The Tsar's Bride - Marfa's Aria. The  
 Nightingale Enslaved by the Rose, Op 2 No 2  
**Shostakovich** Moscow, Cheryomushki - The clock  
 on the square is lit up; I used to go to school  
**Stravinsky** The Nightingale - Nightingale's Song  
**Olga Peretyatko** sop  
**Ural Philharmonic Orchestra / Dmitry Liss**  
 Sony Classical © 88985 35223-2  
 (55' • DDD • T/t)



After a couple of albums of *bel canto* arias, Olga Peretyatko is on home soil for

'Russian Light'. Her journey on this disc doesn't take her on an obvious route back to St Petersburg. There are few Russian roles on her CV and her lyric coloratura soprano isn't yet weighty enough for, say, Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*. However, this collection is an engaging mix of songs and operatic arias which dip into lesser-known repertoire. There is a little crossover with *Aida* Garifullina's recent debut album (Decca, 3/17), as well as Anna Netrebko's wonderful 'Russian Album' (DG, 11/06).

Netrebko makes for an interesting comparison, as she started out singing coloratura Russian roles at the Mariinsky. Indeed, the first recording on which she featured was Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, which tickled the canary-fancier in John Steane 20 years ago (Philips/Decca, 5/97). Peretyatko opens with Lyudmila's cavatina and is a good deal more secure leaping about the stave, tossing off high notes without a care (although it's worth noting the Mariinsky recording was taken from staged performances).

Are we seeing a welcome renaissance for Rimsky-Korsakov's operas? Peretyatko includes four arias here, as did Garifullina for Decca. Marfa's aria from *The Tsar's Bride* is exquisitely controlled, betraying

recent stage experience. She ripples through the chromatic knots of the Hymn to the Sun with silvery seductiveness, although Garifullina uses a wider palette of colours. Her Snow Maiden is impetuous and urgent, while Volkhova's tender lullaby (from *Sadko*) contains the disc's most haunting singing. The Ural Philharmonic Orchestra provide sensitive accompaniments under Dmitry Liss.

Five songs (four by Rachmaninov) come off well, in less soupy orchestral arrangements than Garifullina suffered, and with a far more flowing tempo for 'Vocalise'. Netrebko is very special though in 'Don't sing, my beauty', a deeper, more emotional performance. By 2006 her voice had already darkened, whereas Peretyatko's sound is much brighter.

Peretyatko first earned international recognition singing in Robert Lepage's production of Stravinsky's *Le rossignol* (Toronto and Aix) and the Nightingale's Song is brilliantly executed here. Shostakovich's *Cheryomushki* marked another career milestone, learning the role in two days to replace an indisposed colleague, and makes a light-hearted conclusion to this highly enjoyable disc.

**Mark Pullinger**



The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

# Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

## Liane Carroll

### The Right To Love

Quiet Money © QUMR0004CD



While her previous album, *Seaside*, presented a 10-track love letter to her home town of Hastings, *The Right To Love* features 10 beautifully arranged songs that present a paean to love itself in all its guises. Some of Carroll's most beloved songwriters are included, not least a soulful reworking of Hoagy Carmichael's 'Skylark' prefaced by Kirk Whalum's canorous tenor sax and incorporating dreamy analogue synth riffs courtesy of album producer James McMillan. Carroll's singing on the title track is by turns heart-warming and true, and her recapitulation of the line 'ooh, the sweet look of wonder' is one of the most uplifting and joyous things in recorded

music. Carroll's articulation of the pain and joy of living, an ineffable mixture of exultation and sorrow, lights up a tremulous 'If You Go Away'. Dedicated to her mother, Clare, the collection is brought to a close by the raw emotional power of 'I Get Along Without You Very Well'. A staggeringly fine album, I can think of no other collection this year that's made such an indelible impression. **Peter Quinn**

## Chick Corea

### The Musician

Concord Records © CJA00019



Chick Corea's birthday celebrations at New York's Blue Note jazz club have grown in length in direct proportion to their popularity. Last year, when he celebrated his 75th, they lasted eight weeks. *The Musician*,

spread over 3 CDs, documents the event. What is immediately striking is the ease with which Corea moves between the *My Spanish Heart*-inspired Spanish jazz with Jorge Prado and Carles Benavent; hard-hitting fusion with a reconvened Return to Forever with Frank Gambale on guitar; lyrical Bill Evans-flavoured piano trio explorations with Gary Peacock and Brian Blade; the jazz-rock flavoured Five Peace Band with John McLaughlin; duets of subtle improvisational interaction with vocalist Bobby McFerrin, vibist Gary Burton (plus string quartet), Herbie Hancock and Marcus Roberts; a Miles tribute featuring Wallace Roney on trumpet and, to top it all off, a propulsive set with his Elektric Band. Throughout, Corea's mastery of each style and his unfailing creative energy is the catalyst that sustains a level of jazz performance that can only be described as exceptional. **Stuart Nicholson**

# World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

## Nikos Tsiachris

### Alcance

Galileo Music © GMC075



As flamenco continues to expand its appeal across the globe, one familiar disappointment is to hear foreign guitarists who have learned its techniques, but not the spirit of the music. There are no such problems, thankfully, with Nikos Tsiachris. He's a Greek guitarist based in Berlin who has mastered many styles on his instrument. Throughout this album he demonstrates that he understands the sweep and drama of flamenco; his songs have structure and narrative, while his playing is often spectacular. There is nothing notably Greek in his sound, but he does bring plenty of fresh ideas: a subtle line of trumpet playing, some double bass

or a shimmering wash of electric guitar. The album ends with the lovely, tender song 'Veleta' sung by Juan Cárdenas. There's a wonderful range of palos (flamenco styles) and he has a stunning touch on the guitar. His classical technique shows through occasionally and there's a slight reticence from time to time. Despite this, *Alcance* is one of the most refreshing and beautifully played albums of flamenco guitar to appear in a long time. **Jo Setters**

## Rubén González

### Introducing ... Rubén González

World Circuit © WCD 049



Recorded in two days in Havana in 1996 at the end of the Buena Vista Social Club sessions, the debut solo album by the veteran pianist Rubén González – 76 at the time – is

an all-time Cuban classic. The original album featured nine tracks. González's piano was accompanied by a lean and supple rhythm section of Orlando 'Cachaíto' López on bass and various percussionists on shuffling timbales and bongos, embellished with flute and trumpet. This expanded reissue adds one previously unreleased track and offers extended versions of two others that previously appeared in edited form. The new track is a six-and-a-half-minute jam simply titled 'Descarga Rubén y Cachaíto'. It is full of thrilling González arpeggios mixing jazz and classical tropes, while López runs up and down the strings of his upright bass with uninhibited abandon and 'Guajiro' Mirabal adds some wild trumpet stabs. If you already have the album, it may not be worth repurchasing for an additional 11 minutes of music. But if not, you should fill the hole in your library immediately. **Nigel Williamson**

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# MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly proposes two related listening journeys inspired by soprano Barbara Hannigan

## Inspirational female voices

**Barbara Hannigan's** championing of new music – see our cover story – is central to her musical philosophy. Last year's *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards saw her breathtaking recording of Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* taking the Contemporary Award, a popular choice. **Cathy Berberian**, possessor of one of the most astoundingly flexible and deliciously flavourful voices on record, was the muse for numerous composers including her husband Luciano Berio (who wrote his wonderful *Folk Songs* for her). But it's her own *Stripsody* that I've chosen, a work that can still bring a blush to the cheek with its unabashed sauciness.

**Jane Manning** is, for anyone interested in contemporary music over the past half century, one of its key vocalists. A great exponent of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, Manning has also inspired numerous composers to write for her. An extraordinary example of her art is Harrison Birtwistle's *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus* from 1972 – it demands the kind of fearless vocalism that Berio would regularly call on Berberian for – and Manning is on magnificent form, and rather touching in the quiet yet intense (and beautifully articulated) speech-singing that ends this 18-minute score. The American **Dawn Upshaw** has inspired and performed a copious amount of new music, and quite a lot has made it onto recordings. Her light, versatile soprano and highly appealing vocal colour is heard to great effect in Kaaja Saariaho's *Lonh*, a 16-minute work for voice and electronics from 1996 to a text by the 12th-century Jaufré Rudel (whose story inspired Saariaho's opera *L'amour de loin*), and touched with a sensuality that people rarely associate with contemporary music. Another American singer, **Phyllis Bryn Julson**, deserves to be mentioned in this company, possessor of a light soprano that wraps itself around angular melodies with great ease. She recorded extensively and I've chosen Taverner's *Akhmatova: Requiem* which finds Bryn Julson on magnificent form. I've also chosen **Linda Hirst**, another British soprano and passionate champion of new music, in Boulez's seminal *Le marteau sans maître*, a work she does magically.

**Abrahamsen** *let me tell you* Hannigan; BRSO / Nelsons **Winter & Winter**

**Berberian** *Stripsody* Berberian Wergo

**Birtwistle** *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus* Manning; Matrix Ensemble / Hacker **Lyrta**

**Saariaho** *Lonh* Upshaw; electronics Ondine

**Taverner** *Akhmatova: Requiem* Bryn Julson; BBC SO / Rozhdestvensky NMC

**Boulez** *Le marteau sans maître* Hirst; Lontano / Martinez Lorelt

Throughout history, singers from Pauline Viardot to Cathy Berberian have inspired the great composers to explore and celebrate the myriad capabilities of the female voice



Cathy Berberian: an astoundingly flexible mezzo

## Pauline Viardot's legacy

One of the most inspirational artists of the 19th century was the French mezzo of Spanish descent Pauline Viardot (1821-1910). Her dance card was a long one and the list of people she knew reads like a who's who of the greatest creative minds of her time: Liszt, de Musset, George Sand, Turgenev, Gounod, Berlioz, Chopin, Saint-Saëns, Meyerbeer ... Fluent in Spanish, French, Italian and English, and clearly pretty competent in Russian, she sang, composed (her oeuvre includes five operas as well as many songs) and taught. And she inspired some great music from the major composers of her day. Saint-Saëns dedicated *Samson et Dalila* to her (but she declined to sing the role of Delilah because of her age). She created the role of Fidès in Meyerbeer's

*Le Prophète*, a gutsy part and one in which she made quite an impact. One of her party pieces, and a role she sang more than 150 times, was Orpheus in Gluck's opera *Orphée et Eurydice* in Berlioz's orchestration (and he conducted her first performances of the piece). His version was tailored to the voice of Viardot, and she clearly delivered. (Forlane's recording, using Berlioz's orchestration, finds Ewa Podles on fine form in the Viardot role.) Charles Gounod wrote his opera *Sapho* (1851) for Viardot and, though at first the work received only nine performances, it was enough to put the composer on the map – Viardot's presence among the cast can't have done any harm! Viardot's fame and influence was not confined to France; in 1870 (by which time she'd settled in Germany), Brahms persuaded her to sing in the premiere of his *Alto Rhapsody*, a work he'd written as a wedding present for Julia, the daughter of his friends Robert and Clara Schumann. It merely backs up the belief that Viardot must have had a rich voice closer to contralto than a modern mezzo (her range, too, was considerable). As to her own music, and to prove that she wasn't just wedded to the voice, try her delightful *Violin Sonatina* of 1874 where melody is prized over harmony, but which nevertheless conveys a strong and appealing compositional voice.

**Saint-Saëns** *Samson et Dalila* – Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix Lemieux; Orch Nat de France / Gabel Naïve

**Meyerbeer** *Le Prophète* – O toi qui m'abandonnes Horne; RPO / Lewis Sony Classical

**Gluck/Berlioz** *Orphée et Eurydice* – J'ai perdu mon Eurydice Podles; Collegium Brugense / Peire Forlane

**Gounod** *Sapho* – O my lyra immortelle Garanča; Filarmonica del Teatro Comunale di Bologna / Abel DG

**Brahms** *Alto Rhapsody* Blythe; Ensemble Orchestral de Paris / Nelson Warner Classics

**Viardot** *Violin Sonatina* Kuppel; Manz Naxos



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# REPLAY

**Rob Cowan's** monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## *Two fine pianists and a classic string quartet*

Distinguished concertos from top Mozartians and a cellist to place alongside Rostropovich and Fournier

**T**he reappearance on CD of **Lili Kraus's** cycle of Mozart piano concertos from the mid-1960s is welcome, since it never enjoyed an official release in the UK, not even on LP as I recall. Kraus's collaborators are the Vienna Festival Orchestra under Stephen Simon, a conductor who studied with Josef Krips, himself a distinguished Mozartian. As *Gramophone's* Jed Distler makes clear in his excellent booklet note, the sessions were far from easy, Kraus all the while insisting that the orchestra should play softer, which they insisted they couldn't – although in the end, they did. Sound-wise, the recordings are well managed, with a bright, close-set piano image and generally transparent orchestral textures. The performances are mostly very musical, although there are times when the accompaniments sound 'phoned in', the opening to K595 being a case in point: compared with Schuricht's Swiss recording with Casadesus on Audite (see next page) it is a rather humdrum affair – that is until Kraus enters and puts matters to rights. Thereafter the musical dialogue springs to life, with some well-crafted solo playing.

Kraus was a Schnabel pupil and her occasional impetuosity very much reminds me of the older player, for example in the finale of K467, an exhilarating performance all round. I loved the excited busyness of the early D major Concerto, K175, both Kraus and Simon entering into the fray with evident enthusiasm. By contrast, in No 25 in C major, K503, Kraus sounds a little under duress (say around 4'01" in the first movement), but I'm being picky in the face of some fairly stiff competition, both old and recent. I happen to have by me Julius Katchen's Decca recording with Karl Münchinger and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra taped during the previous year (in 1967, now available in 'Julius Katchen: the Complete Decca Recordings'), and to be honest the sense of play that Katchen

achieves, especially in the context of Münchinger's more sternly purposeful accompaniment, wins me over in a way that Kraus's doesn't. As does his wider range of dynamics, which imbues the music with so much added colour. The great C minor, K491, like K595, opens prosaically, but once Kraus arrives, poise and tonal variety reign. Likewise in the *Larghetto*, where the solo opening is limpid and free but the ensuing *tutti* rather muddy.

Journeying through this set has in general proved a satisfying experience if without the consistent pleasure yield that I gain from, say, Ingrid Haebler (Philips) and Géza Anda (DG). Kraus's classical approach is mostly beyond criticism, but to say that she met her artistic match with Simon and his Viennese orchestra would be misleading. They're perfectly adequate, but you only have to sample Casadesus and Szell, Brendel and Marriner or self-directed versions by Uchida and Anda to realise what's missing. So you will be buying this set principally for the solo playing. Worth it? On balance, I'd say yes.

A short while ago APR released a two-CD set devoted to the Electrola and DG recordings of **Erik-Then Bergh** (2/17) which included a fine 1951 version of Reger's hugely entertaining *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Georg Philipp Telemann*, a performance that I rated as 'joyous, elegant and crisply articulated'. APR's vinyl-based transfer was pretty good, but now DG Eloquence, using master tapes, have come up with an alternative which is both clearer and largely free of hiss. APR's couplings include a superb stereo account of the Reger Concerto under Hans Rosbaud, so there's no way I'd withhold my recommendation for that set. On the other hand, Eloquence offer an exceptionally persuasive 1952 account of Beethoven's *Diabelli* Variations by **Paul Baumgartner**, where every variation is granted its own character and the playing

is unostentatiously brilliant. The beauty of Baumgartner's approach is in the way he allows the work to be what it actually is – the sum of its parts, rather than the sum of various pianistic effects. It's above all a profoundly intelligent reading and, as it draws towards the closing fugue, profound, too.

On the chamber music front I've been delighted to reacquaint myself with the **Vlach Quartet's** recordings of Beethoven quartets, primarily the Op 18 works, recorded in 1969-70. These are thoughtful, measured performances, tonally alluring, precisely articulated and cogently argued. Nos 2 and 3 from the set come off especially well, but the deal doesn't stop there. We're also given a compelling account of the first *Razumovsky* Quartet and a version of Op 131 that in the days of vinyl many readers will have cut their teeth on, not perhaps the most ethereal account available – the Busch and Amadeus Quartets must take the palm in that respect – but beautifully played all the same. The final item, the only mono recording in the set, is a finely wrought reading of Mozart's great D minor Quartet, K421, in which the closing *Allegretto ma non troppo* is especially effective. All transfers are excellent. **G**

### THE RECORDINGS



**'Lili Kraus Plays Mozart Piano Concertos: The Complete Columbia Recordings 1965-66'**  
Sony Classical © 12  
8898 530258-2



**Beethoven Diabelli Variations Reger Telemann Variations Then-Bergh, Baumgartner**  
DG Eloquence © 482 5880



**Beethoven. Mozart String Quartets Vlach Quartet**  
Supraphon © 4 SU4221-2



Lili Kraus's Mozart piano concertos cycle, recorded for Columbia, make a welcome reappearance on CD

## Schuricht and Casadesus at the Lucerne Festival

First to clarify: this is not the same K595 from **Robert Casadesus** and **Carl Schuricht** that appears on Orfeo (C536 001B), though the two are very alike, while the live VPO Brahms Second post-dates that recently reissued in 'Carl Schuricht: the Complete Decca Recordings' (7/17) by roughly nine years. This Mozart features the Swiss Festival Orchestra (the Orfeo, from Salzburg, is with the VPO) and finds Casadesus on top form, possibly out-classing his various other recordings – live and studio – of the same work. Schuricht directs fluid, well-paced accompaniment, stylishly shaped and beautifully played. Right from his first entry, Casadesus displays his signature clarity of finger work, building crescendos with impeccable judgement, switching between a sprightly staccato and warming legato. The *Larghetto* conjures up a mood of utter stillness: this truly is artistry of the highest order.

The Brahms is mellower than its predecessor, less volatile too. But there are moments that are unforgettable: the gently nudged strings beneath the solo horn at 12'23" into the first movement; the glowing blend of lower strings and brass for the second movement's second subject; and, most magical, the return of the outer section of the *Allegretto grazioso* (from 3'15"), so much more gentle than on the older version. Towards the close of the finale, from 7'55", Schuricht gives precedence to the lower strings' motif, which greatly intensifies the build-up to the coda. The Decca version is similar but

nowhere near as effective. Both works are captured in fine mono sound. And if you want to investigate a compelling follow-up, try Casadesus and Schuricht with the Orchestre National de la RTF in Brahms's Second Concerto (on INA) – not perfect by any means, but consistently gripping.

### THE RECORDING



**Mozart** Piano Concerto, K595  
**Brahms** Symphony No 2  
Casadesus; Swiss Festival Orchestra; VPO / Schuricht  
Audite (M) 95 645

## Navarra in Prague

One of my all-time favourite single cello tracks, a real tear-jerker, is Maurice Maréchal playing 'Plainte' by Louis de Caix d'Hervelois (available in a good transfer from Cello Classics). He did remake it post-war with Cecile Ousset (BnF, as part of Caix d'Hervelois's 'Première suite') but that early version is the one to have. However, given the choice for a later recording I'd opt for André Navarra, his Supraphon version confusingly included as part of a five-movement 'Cello Suite No 2'. Heart-warming playing this, part of the final disc of '**André Navarra: Prague Recordings**', which includes among its contents finely drawn and expressively potent readings of the Beethoven Third and Prokofiev Sonatas.

Prokofiev's *Sinfonia concertante* has the inestimable advantage of chipper orchestral support from the Czech Philharmonic under Karel Ančerl, as does Respighi's songful *Adagio con variazioni*, Brahms's Double Concerto (with Josef Suk), Bloch's *Schelomo* and, especially fine, Schumann's Concerto,

notable for its inward lyricism, singing lines and chamber-like accompaniment. Alfred Holeček joins Navarra for the two Brahms sonatas (like various other items, first releases on CD), the first's *Allegro non troppo*, more an *andante* here, adds up even without the repeat to a generous 12'27". Navarra's precise reading of dynamics and indications, allied to his style and beautiful sound, guarantee pleasure. Then there are the two works for cello with winds, Martinů's Concertino and Ibert's Concerto both rich in character. Constantin Silvestri directs a dynamic account of the Lalo Concerto, Navarra always an impassioned presence. And there are the duos with Josef Suk, Kodály's Op 7 and Honegger's Sonatina being highlights. This Navarra collection sits on the same exalted plain as recent memorable sets devoted to Rostropovich and Fournier. Snap it up while you can.

### THE RECORDING



**'André Navarra: Prague Recordings'**  
Various artists  
Supraphon (M) (S) SU4229-2

## Digital by name only

Two of the works in the Navarra set are also included in Praga's **Tribute to Gregor Piatigorsky**, but here I must immediately raise an objection or three. 'Genuine Stereo Lab: re-mastered from studio stereo recordings,' we're told. Well, for openers, neither of the recordings said to be with the RCA Victor SO under Fritz Reiner – Brahms's Double Concerto (with Nathan Milstein) and Saint-Saëns' First Concerto – were ever, as far as I know, recorded in stereo. Besides which, the Brahms isn't with the RCA Orchestra but the Robin Hood Dell Orchestra of Philadelphia (Robin Hood Dell being the orchestra's summer venue). And then to complicate matters further the one recording that is, rightfully, in stereo (as issued by RCA), Bloch's *Schelomo* with the Boston Symphony under Charles Munch, has been transferred in mono. If none of that worries you, *Schelomo* is tight as a drum, not quite in the Feuermann/Stokowski class but almost as dramatic and wonderfully played by Piatigorsky. The concertos are equally good, the Brahms especially.

### THE RECORDING



**Brahms** Double Concerto  
**Bloch** Schelomo **Saint-Saëns**  
Cello Concerto  
Piatigorsky, Milstein, Reiner  
Praga Digitalis (M) PRD250 368



# Books



## Jed Distler enjoys an American conductor's lively memoirs:

*'As an emerging conductor Schwarz carefully observed those under whom he played, and his memories are pure gold'*



## Rob Cowan delves into a collection of essays on the violin and its history:

*'Needless to say Tartini and his Devil's Trill Sonata take centre stage, while Stravinsky, Mahler and other devil conjurers follow suit'*

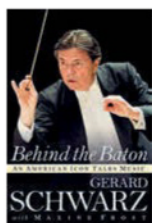
### Behind the Baton

**An American Icon Talks Music**

**By Gerard Schwarz, with Maxine Frost**

Amadeus Press, HB, 378pp, £22

ISBN 978-1-574-67476-7



One shouldn't open a book review on a personal note, but an exception seems appropriate here. I met the conductor Gerard Schwarz for the first time this past April, the night before the American Pianists Association Competition Gala Finals weekend, where he was scheduled to lead each of the five finalists in a concerto with the Indianapolis Symphony. The maestro was playing informal bartender at a small post-event gathering with friends, colleagues and associates. I prodded him for stories about working with Elliott Carter and Pierre Boulez, about his collaborations with Claudio Arrau, Shura Cherkassky, Teresa Stratas, Paul Tortelier and other great soloists. Schwarz graciously regaled us with colourful stories that were amusing without being the least bit catty. Surprisingly, Schwarz asked for my opinions of the gala performances. His responses, in turn, exuded candour, compassion and insight. He was also quick to praise the orchestra's sharply honed ensemble and terrific first-desk soloists.

My point is that Schwarz on paper and Schwarz in person are pretty much one and the same. While *Behind the Baton* is far from a no-holds-barred confessional, his autobiography generously reveals the man and the musician on many levels. Much of the text derives from interviews with Schwarz, which partly explains the fluid, conversational prose style that mostly prevails. The first 10 chapters follow a chronological narrative thread that encompasses Schwarz's childhood and early music education, his years as a freelance trumpet virtuoso and New York Philharmonic co-principal, his decision to

devote himself to conducting full-time and the various positions that provided invaluable experience for his longtime stints at the helm of the Seattle Symphony, New York's Mostly Mozart Festival and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

By contrast, chapters 11 to 22 are more compartmentalised, respectively devoted to topics like family life, composing, opera and specific music directorships under Schwarz's watch. As a consequence, the chronology zigzags and the narrative momentum varies greatly from chapter to chapter.

For example, Schwarz chronicles his Liverpool stint not so much as a story but rather as a calendar of events, supplemented by press reviews. Schwarz's affection for the city and his musicians is obvious, yet he says little beyond accounting for the many concerts and recordings that transpired during that time. Conversely, he comes alive when writing about courting his wife Jody or beaming over his children's adult accomplishments. Roughly one third of the book is given over to Schwarz's long tenure as music director of the Seattle Symphony, from 1985 to 2011. Here he pays tribute to his predecessors while giving a detailed account of how he helped build the orchestra up into a world-class ensemble and major artistic force in the community. He also addresses his side of the story concerning the orchestra's much publicised discord, documented in a 2007 *New York Times* article that portrayed Schwarz in unflattering terms.

Some observers feel that the Schwarz/Seattle partnership culminated with the opening in 1998 of Benaroya Hall, the city's acoustically sophisticated concert venue and present home to the orchestra. On the other hand, Schwarz's career-long dedication to cultivating the music of living composers and his advocacy of relatively neglected works by American masters resulted in a significant legacy of concert premieres and recordings with the Seattle Symphony. The core of Schwarz's recorded legacy centres upon America's 20th-century symphonic tradition, whose luminaries include, among others, Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, Paul Creston (Schwarz's

composition professor), Alan Hovhaness, William Schuman and David Diamond. Diamond found a most steadfast and loyal champion in Schwarz, whose recordings have clearly helped raise Diamond's standing among symphonists.

As an emerging conductor Schwarz carefully observed those under whom he played, and his memories are pure gold. Leopold Stokowski, for example, spoke relatively little at rehearsals, letting his hands do the work, yet insisted that Schwarz show up early to rehearsals and warm up in the hall, in his presence. There's a fascinating account of Pablo Casals going over a two-bar phrase again and again for 45 minutes, emphasising a different note each time. Although Schwarz was close to Bernstein and Boulez in New York, he welcomed opportunities to pick Erich Leinsdorf's encyclopaedic brain most of all. He retains fond memories of the late experimental composer Lucia Dlugoszewski, whose chronic tardiness with deadlines extended to not having parts ready at certain first performances, leaving Schwarz and his cohorts no choice but to improvise. Schwarz's experience and communicative gifts also reveal themselves in chapters containing short and succinct descriptions of what conductors do (or, more accurately, what they should do) along with the particular characteristics of orchestral instruments. For all of Schwarz's honours, accomplishments and acclaim, it's still the music that counts, first and foremost.

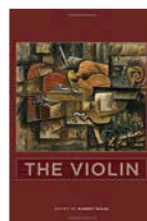
**Jed Distler**

### The Violin

**Edited by Robert Riggs**

University of Rochester Press, HB, 328pp, £19.99

ISBN 978-1-580-46506-9



Robert Riggs and his select line-up of contributors usefully frame the main body of this wide-ranging

collection – where significant violin music and some (though by no means all) of its finest interpreters are subject to close scrutiny – with investigations concerning death and the devil, the peripatetic violin and fiddling in America. Needless to say Tartini and his *Devil's Trill* Sonata take centre stage, while Stravinsky, Mahler and other devil conjurors follow suit. So what was it that made the fiddle such a magnetic force in early devil depiction? The ghostly 'sawing' of bow on gut, the suggestively feminine curvature of its design, or perhaps its proximity of mouth, jaw and heart? That's not an issue that Riggs follows through, though at times he comes close.

The chapter on violins and violinists in literature is especially interesting, Nathan Shaham's *The Rosendorf Quartet* a fictionalised version of a factual situation where players fleeing Nazi Germany join the Palestine Orchestra (not 'Philharmonic' as stated), later to become the Israel Philharmonic. I learned a great deal from this section of the book though I was surprised that Sherlock Holmes's embracing the violin is deemed an 'eccentricity'. After all, as Riggs himself points out, Holmes was interested enough in the instrument and its star practitioners to have Watson join him for a recital by Sarasate at St James's Hall. He also attended a concert by the future Lady Hallé.

Riggs wisely covers himself by pointing out that what he's produced is by no means a comprehensive survey and yet at least one significant omission warrants a mention: Adolf Busch, whose quartet was surely the finest of the pre-war era and whose recording of Bach's D minor Partita – a classic beyond doubt and the first ever made – should have entered the roll call of quoted versions. He was also the first soloist with the Palestine Orchestra, chosen by its founder, another great violinist, Bronisław Huberman. Certain staples of the repertoire are rigorously narrated, whether Bach and before, the Classics, Romantics or Moderns, though I would have thought that when it comes to late 20th-century music Steve Reich's *Violin Phase*, a 'first' worth reckoning with, might have warranted a mention.

However, for readers of *Gramophone*, the book's centrepiece will be Eitan Ornoy's chapter 'The Masters' Voice: Recordings as Documentation of Performance Practice'. Right from the off, which deals with acoustic recordings, I wondered about the reference to 'limited disc size' dictating the length of works that could be tackled. True, there were different



Gerard Schwarz on paper and in person are pretty much one and the same

disc sizes (albeit very few) but surely what Ornoy means is limited disc playing times, though most of our readers will latch on to the ambiguity. Also the accusation of 'high distortion' on early violin records is unfounded, certainly if you listen to the best discs of Kreisler, Elman, Thibaud, Busch or Maud Powell ... unless the discs happen to have been worn by the excessive use of steel needles.

Various scholarly investigations are referred to but these are of limited value if you don't have the specific recordings to hand. One in particular deals with the Beethoven Concerto – 33 recordings in all – and although we're told about aspects of stylistic diversity (articulation, tone colours, vibrato, etc) you'll need to take the analyses on trust. Maybe an accompanying CD would have been of use, with salient passages reproduced for comparison. Of particular interest is Ornoy's treatment of recordings on period instruments, especially regarding the late Sergiu Luca's discs of Bach's solo violin works. William Primrose – whose vibrant viola-playing style hailed from an earlier age – praised Luca's 'sweetness of tone, the cunning avoidance of vibrato in the twentieth-century manner ... charming use of "notes inégales" [unequal notes]

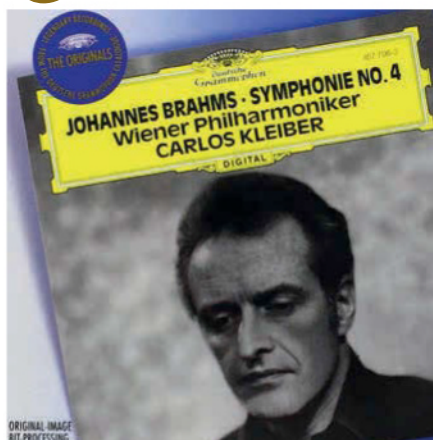
especially in the opening of the Chaconne, and ... healthy tempi, avoidance of undue sentimentality, and hortatory declaration. It is a presentation of everything I have looked for for so long in Bach performance.' I'd never have expected such a candid declaration of faith in historic performance practice from a one-time playing colleague of Heifetz, Feuermann and Piatigorsky.

Turning to the 'multifaceted' Viktoria Mullova, Ornoy comments on her 'unique fusion of the modern Russian school [she was a Leonid Kogan pupil] with HIP [historically informed performance practice]'. But if you want a real ear-opener Mullova-wise, I suggest you compare her Philips and Onyx recordings of Bach's B minor Solo Partita, the Allemande in particular, post-Kogan on Philips, post-Kuijken on Onyx, the latter markedly 'HIP', swift, with lowered pitch and the lightest inflections, the former weightier and magisterial. So there are in effect two very different Mullovas to choose from.

An interesting volume, then, more a prompt for further reading than holy writ in its own right. Each chapter is tailed by extensive notes, with sources cited. I'd advise you to consult those too. **Rob Cowan**



# Classics RECONSIDERED



**Rob Cowan and Richard Bratby**  
revisit Carlos Kleiber's  
recording of Brahms's  
Symphony No 4  
on DG



## Brahms

### Symphony No 4

**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Carlos Kleiber**  
DG 457 7062

Hanslick likened Brahms's Fourth Symphony to a dark well: 'the longer we look into it, the more brightly the stars shine back'. Once upon a time it had many distinguished living exponents; nowadays, to judge by the releases in the last decade, it is less easily mastered; which is why one thrills to a performance as ardent and stylistically sure as Carlos Kleiber's. The model is almost certainly Karajan, whose

1978 DG version stands alongside Sir Adrian Boult's HMV performance as the representative recording of recent times; though first impressions of the new Kleiber performance brought back memories, not so much of Karajan, but of Toscanini.

Like Toscanini and Karajan, Kleiber marries glorious orchestral playing to an interpretation, at once fierce, noble and sympathetic, which perfectly elucidates Brahms's tragic discourse. The Vienna Philharmonic strings have a sweetness, comparable to that of the Berliners, which they have lacked since the days of Krauss

and Bruno Walter. The digital recording conveys the glorious playing with great fidelity. *Fortissimo* string passages may strike some as being unduly fierce but in all other respects the perspectives are well judged.

Devotees of the proven readings of Boult and Karajan may think Kleiber's adrenalin-flow too strong, high drama substituted for inescapable tragedy in the symphony's finale pages. But Kleiber's is a performance to be bought and studied, absorbing enough on first acquaintance and beyond.

**Richard Osborne (4/81)**

**Rob Cowan** In the 36 years that have passed since the first release of Carlos Kleiber's Brahms Four we have witnessed numerous newer versions and historic recordings that weren't available when Richard Osborne prepared his original review. Toscanini's NBC recording from December 1951 has been supplemented by earlier NBC alternatives and, most significantly, a 1935 broadcast with the BBC Symphony. For me the real litmus test in performances of this work occurs at bar 129 of the finale, the return of the passacaglia theme brazenly stated by *forte* brass and woodwinds with the strings responding *fortissimo* five bars later. With Kleiber there's an oddly hesitant 'mini *rit*' at bar 136 (5'31"), where the score has a *sforzando*. No such *rit* impedes the flow with Toscanini and the NBC, which is relatively bland in comparison with his BBC version, where the descending strings take huge, emphatic strides. Toscanini in London truly flexes his muscles, though Kleiber is impeccably truthful when it comes to observing Brahms's dynamics.

**Richard Bratby** It's certainly a good point at which to take the pulse of any interpretation

of this symphony: the moment at which the conductor has to set their final course towards the symphony's closing bars, with the possibilities ranging from stark classical tragedy to high Romantic pathos, and all possible shades in between. That little *rit* you mention seems to me to represent Kleiber leaning decisively towards the Romantic – and that's consistent with his whole reading. Am I allowed to use the term 'Wagnerian' here? However powerful Kleiber's command of the symphony's structure, and for all his alertness to Brahms's instructions, this performance is full of small instances where you seem to glimpse vast landscapes of emotion beyond the notes. From bar 217 (at 7'23") onwards in that same finale, Toscanini in London powers onwards. But with Kleiber, the accompanying cellos and violas genuinely sound – as Brahms writes – *dolce*.

**RC** I like your Romantic reference and yet my preference is for small-r 'romantic' (using the *Concise OED*'s primary definition) narrative. That way, all paths lead to Meiningen, provided the destination is clear from the start. Which isn't to say that

malleable phrasing and the odd inserted comma can't work. It often does. I'd certainly agree that observing the *dolce* directive from bar 217 onwards is a vital part of that – well, yes – narrative. But Kleiber isn't the only conductor to indulge the moment without distorting the line, at least for the most part. Another serious contender is David Zinman, whose 2010 RCA/Arte Nova Brahms cycle with the Tonhalle Orchestra includes a Fourth that parades virtues similar to Kleiber's. Aside from that same passage in the finale (violins, cellos and the woodwinds that sing above them), the symphony's opening ebbs and flows much as Kleiber's does, the lower strings projecting an even fuller bloom, though Kleiber's delicate Viennese tracteries at the start of the work are unforgettable.

**RB** I'll just throw in the comment that Brahms supposedly made (possibly tongue-in-cheek; you can never be quite sure with this composer) after conducting this symphony with the Meiningen orchestra, and which RO quotes in his sleeve note to DG's 1998 re-release: 'I couldn't make enough slowings and



'Vivid, polished, occasionally mannered', but Kleiber's celebrated Brahms is still definitely worth hearing

accelerations.' I'm persuaded by Kleiber's approach, while happily acknowledging that there are other ways of delivering it. But with all respect to the splendid Tonhalle Orchestra, would you really choose them over the 1981-model Vienna Philharmonic – or, at least, the Vienna Philharmonic as they play for Kleiber? There's that passage in the first movement, bar 90 (2'37"), when the strings suddenly soar upwards in response – for me, a moment that makes the heart leap. You can hear the Zurich players straining every expressive muscle: while the Viennese, almost without trying, simply light up the sky. There's a radiance there that feels utterly unforced, to me anyway.

**RC** 'Almost without trying,' you say; 'a radiance there that feels utterly unforced'. I take your points, also that the Tonhalle isn't the VPO, but surely in this of all symphonies the blazing finale should be hard won, earned almost, so that by the time we reach the coda our every nerve end feels exposed. Brahms has forced us to face tragedy head on, with no compromises. Karajan gets closer to my ideal, Mengelberg (in 1938) closer still but for me Kleiber's

Fourth has a touch of designer sleekness about it; you sense the decade during which it was recorded, the comfortable bloom of economic expansion. It's too well groomed. I'm excited by what I hear (the lead-up to the finale's towering hammer blows, for example) but somehow feel short-changed by a lack of grit. You mentioned Wagner earlier, and when I turn to Kleiber's *Tristan* there's a degree of intensity, a burning sense of commitment, that I find lacking here. But there's beauty aplenty, especially in the slow movement, the glorious return of the second idea.

**RB** Well, I don't hold any particular brief for the VPO; in fact one of my sticking points is the sound of the Vienna horns at the opening of the *Andante*. So rounded and smooth – and yet we know that Brahms was deeply ambivalent about the homogenous sound of modern valve horns: 'brass violas', he called them. Other gripes: the way Kleiber leans on the accents in the opening theme of the Scherzo feels overdone to me, and while Brahms was famously hostile to instruments making what he called 'an effect', the poor old triangle gets a bit

subsumed at times. But still, there's a lot of scope for warmth and sonorous beauty in this symphony without compromising the final tragedy, and I feel Kleiber finds that balance. 'You English make Brahms so cold!' said his friend, the pianist Ilona Eibenschütz, to one of his biographers. 'In reality he was such a human person.'

**RC** Human is the word. And you don't need to go far into the piece to illustrate the point: in fact 34 seconds into the first movement, the bar before letter A, is far enough, the little appoggiatura played by first violins. Turn to Bruno Walter with the Columbia Symphony and, aside from the riper preparation for the same bar, even the bar itself seems so much more infused with meaning. Or there's that most demonstrably human of living conductors Herbert Blomstedt recorded live in 1995 with the Bamberg Symphony. Take the opening minutes of the *Andante moderato*, those shifting colours among the winds, like a gradual flowering: Kleiber too is closely attentive to detail here but with Blomstedt you're not aware of a guiding hand, just of nature evolving. Likewise when the second idea wafts in among the cellos (letter C) with wistfully phrased asides from the upper strings, Blomstedt allows everyone a voice. With him I don't feel pressured into admiring the symphony: my love for it comes naturally.

**RB** Hard to argue with Bruno Walter. But I can't say that I find Kleiber's account unnatural or forced: surely it's simply this conductor doing what he does – vivid, polished, occasionally mannered, but with an epic sense of momentum and emotional weight where it counts – and a glorious-sounding orchestra giving of its best in response. I don't like putting artists on pedestals, and there's something a bit cultish about the way DG continues to release these 39 minutes of music without a coupling. But for me there's still a glow about this performance that overcomes all sorts of reservations. And given that there'll never (thank goodness) be any one definitive recording of this symphony, wouldn't you agree that Kleiber brings something distinctive to the table: something unquestionably worth hearing?

**RC** Of course. It's texturally transparent, passionately played, rigorously argued and consistently observant. But is that all that's needed? It's often been said that Brahms was born with an autumnal halo. If for me there's one aspect of this estimable Fourth that's lacking I'd say it's just that: mellow fruitfulness. **G**



# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## IRCAM

Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique was launched in 1977 and is still going strong. **Liam Cagney's** pick of 10 works associated with IRCAM charts its development over the 40-year period

When Pierre Boulez announced the creation of his music research institute, it was with characteristic modesty. 'I have accepted in principle the directorship of the centre for acoustic research in Paris', he wrote in 1972, 'purely in order to attempt a radical reconsideration of the world of music as it now stands.' More than 40 years later, though the world of music is still able to recognise itself in the mirror, IRCAM has become a watchword for sophisticated electronics in classical music.

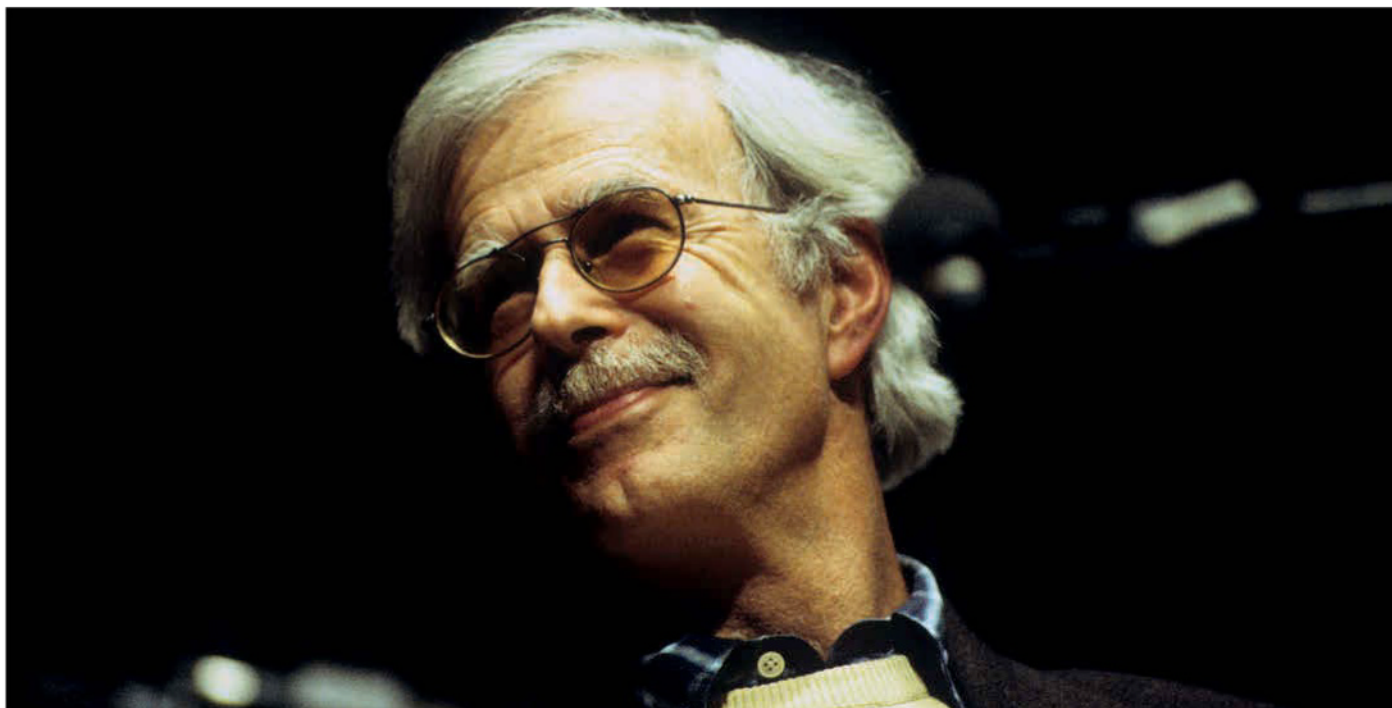
During the 1960s, having ceremonially cut his ties with France, Boulez initially sought to open a music research institute in West Germany; when a collaboration with the Max Planck Society fell at the last hurdle, he blamed it on meddling from

quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg. Since François I (1494-1547), France's leaders have been savvy in cultivating an image of Paris as world capital of culture. Accordingly, when Georges Pompidou was elected President of the French Republic in 1969, over dinner at the Elysée Palace he offered Boulez whatever he desired to ensure the return to France of its celebrated musical son.

Boulez conceived IRCAM as a Bauhaus-like centre of collaboration between composers and scientists. To this end, five departments were established: electroacoustics; computer; pedagogy; instruments and voice; and 'diagonal' (cross-departmental work). When the doors opened in 1977, things were unsteady. Boulez's year-long festival of

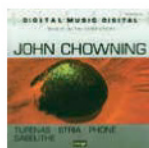
20th-century music, *Passage du XXème Siècle* (1977), drew ire for snubbing almost all of his French peers; in 1980 the departmental heads resigned en masse; and in the 1980s Georgina Born undertook research that culminated in her concertedly negative *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (University of California Press: 1995). But since 1991 IRCAM's trajectory has stabilised.

The catalogue of works composed using IRCAM's electronic resources currently numbers more than 700. In whittling that down to 10 recordings I have sought to give a chronological survey of the institute's development and to strike a balance between famous and lesser-known composers. **G**



Jonathan Harvey was invited to IRCAM by Boulez in the early 1980s. Works written at the institute include *Bhakti* and the tape piece *Mortuos Plango, vivos voco*

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOPFOTO/ARENAPAL

**Chowning****Stria**

Wergo

An early IRCAM commission (from departmental head Berio),

*Stria* (1977) is an indubitable classic of electronic composition. American composer John Chowning fitted Boulez's ideal of a composer-scientist. After studying in Paris with Boulanger, he developed an algorithm for the computer generation of rich, complex, convincing electronic sounds. *Stria* conjures a wonderfully strange sound world, a molten flow of continuous timbral mutation generated by Chowning's technique of frequency modulation (FM) synthesis.

**Boulez****Répons**Andrew Gerzso, Gilbert Nouno  
*elec* Ens InterContemporain /  
Pierre Boulez

Deutsche Grammophon (3/99)

Boulez emerged with all guns blazing in his first IRCAM work: the self-consciously monumental *Répons* (1981-84), in which the audience is encircled by ensemble and electronic sounds (utilising the 4X signal processor). The title refers to the various types of auditory calls and responses within the piece (soloists and ensembles, electronics and players). This Grammy-winning release is a good introduction to Boulez's later, lush music.

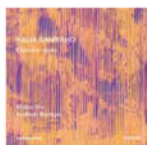
**Murail****Désintégrations**Ensemble de l'Itinéraire /  
Yves Prin  
Montaigne-Naïve

Since the 1980s, spectral music has been something like IRCAM's house style, and Tristan Murail's *Désintégrations* (1982-83) is one of its signature works. On a technical level, the ensemble and electronics are deftly blended through their material all having a common basis in the analysis of particular instrumental sounds (low piano, brass, winds). On a purely sensory level, *Désintégrations* – a de facto single-movement symphony – is abundant in drama.

**Birtwistle****The Mask of Orpheus**Soloists; BBC Singers,  
BBC SO / Andrew Davis;  
Martyn Brabbins

NMC (12/97)

Birtwistle's version of the Orpheus myth – which remains the best opera using IRCAM electronics – is fragmented and non-linear. The electronic tape part, composed in collaboration with Barry Anderson (1935-87), is one means of cohesion, at times winding wispily between instruments and voice, at times exposed in Varèsian interludes. The opera (completed 1984) won Birtwistle the 1987 Grawemeyer Award.

**Saariaho****NoaNoa**Lesley Olson *fl*  
Thomas Neuhaus *elec*  
Kairos (6/05)

In the 1980s Kaija Saariaho was one of the first women to work at IRCAM. In *NoaNoa* (1992) for solo flute and electronics the soloist uses a foot pedal to trigger effects (reverb, delay, resonance). As well as being an enchanting solo, it is a fine example of IRCAM's collaborative processes, having been composed with assistance from developer Jean-Baptiste Barrière (Saariaho's husband), engineer Xavier Chabot and flautist Camilla Hoitenga.

**Aperghis****Machinations**Sylvie Levesque, Donatienne  
Michel-Dansac, Sylvie Sacoun,  
Geneviève Strosser *vocs*Olivier Pasquet *elec* Accord

Georges Aperghis was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the Venice Biennale in 2015, but his fame has yet to transfer to the English-speaking world. In the delirious music theatre work *Machinations* (2000), he imagines the melding of four female characters with a computer counterpart. As with his more recent *Luna Park*, the IRCAM electronics are key to the music's sensory overload effect.

**Manoury****Partita I**Christophe Desjardins *va*  
Diemo Schwarz *elec*  
Kairos

Philippe Manoury is one of Boulez's few stylistic 'children', extending Boulez's style and fusing it with traditional forms. His *Partita I* (2006), like many IRCAM works since the 1990s, uses the real-time electronics programme Max/MSP. In real-time electronics there is no tape part and the instrument itself triggers electronic responses. Although in concert this can lend itself to 'technical difficulties', it more generally gives the electroacoustics a naturalistic feel.

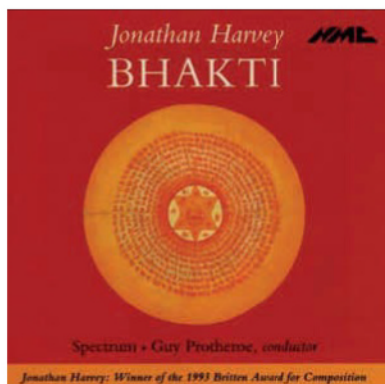
**Francesconi****Etymo**Barbara Hannigan *sop* Benoit  
Meudic, Tom Mays, Thomas  
Hummel *elec* EnsembleInterContemporain / Susanna Mälkki  
Kairos

In *Etymo* (1994), based on Baudelaire's 'Le voyage', the soprano voice duplicates itself and flits around feverishly within an electroacoustic brume. The balance of voice, instruments and electronics is a reminder of the magic that subtle electronic manipulation can bring. Luca Francesconi is writing an opera for Covent Garden in 2020, and this gives a taste of what to expect.

**Lanza****Ludus de morte regis**Gilbert Nouno, Manuel Poletti  
*elec* Les Cris de Paris /  
Geoffroy Jourdain

NoMadMusic

Since the 1990s IRCAM's *cursus* in electroacoustic composition has trained numerous young composers from far and wide. Mauro Lanza (along with the sadly deceased Fausto Romitelli) is one of the best *cursus* graduates. Mixing the ethereal and the bawdy, his *Ludus de morte regis* (2013) for choir and electronics shows how well IRCAM electronics are integrated into the current compositional landscape.

**Harvey****Bhakti Spectrum** / Guy Protheroe

NMC (9/89)

Harvey followed his famous *Mortuos plango, vivos voco* (1980) with *Bhakti* (1982) for 15 players and tape, a brilliantly colourful 50-minute work in 12 sections of instrumental subtlety and meditative richness. Despite its post-serial heritage (Boulez's *Le marteau sans maître* is an ancestor) the music is always limpid and never abstruse. The Hindu title means

'devotion to a god as means of salvation', and in a manner reminiscent of Messiaen, Harvey's devotional music alternates between ebullient and reflective. Of the two available recordings, Spectrum's NMC release trumps the later Nouvel Ensemble Moderne's Montaigne-Naïve release (7/96) for clarity and focus.



# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## *Stravinsky's Les noces*

In his discographical survey of this vocal 'ballet' – which exists in three versions and at least four languages – **Richard Whitehouse** finds that the most rewarding accounts have opted for the 1923 Russian version

**F**ifty years ago, the Beatles changed the face of Western popular music with their album 'Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band'. Fifty years before that, Igor Stravinsky changed the face of Western classical music with his ballet (or rather, *divertissement*) *Les noces*.

The work was not heard publicly for six years, evolving in parallel with Stravinsky's musical idiom and his idea of what a stage work could be. *The Rite of Spring* (1913) had brought visual and musical imagery into new-found accord, so a piece in which each of these articulated the other seemed the inevitable next step. Just how inevitable gave Stravinsky pause for thought, the conception of *Les noces* undergoing a lengthy process of formal and scenic distillation to emerge as the 'Choreographed Scenes with Music and Voices' which it became.

Further ambiguity is occasioned by the text, credited to Stravinsky yet drawing heavily on a volume of wedding songs published in 1911 as a supplement to a collection of folk songs by Pyotr Kireyevsky. There was additional input by Stepan Mitusov (co-librettist of Stravinsky's opera *The Nightingale*) to the fourth tableau – whose music was the first to be drafted. While the vocal layout for four (SATB) soloists and mixed chorus remains consistent, the solo parts rarely correspond with specific protagonists on stage as to voice type or even gender – indicative of the composer's intention that the visual aspect be an extension of music that is inherently abstract, and the primary reason why he demurred from labelling *Les noces* a ballet, preferring 'divertissement' to characterise its vocal, choral and instrumental interplay.

Having realised the short score by October 1917, Stravinsky sought suitable

orchestration. The numerous stages that the work went through veered between extremes of realism and abstraction. It was initially envisaged for large forces, possibly featuring traditional and folk instruments; the composer opted instead for an orchestra scaled down from that in his previous ballets. In 1919 he abandoned that for an array of mechanised keyboards, and only in 1923 did he finally hit upon an ensemble of four pianos and six percussionists, which was to have profound consequences for music of the future.

*Les noces* (also known as *The Wedding* or *Svadebka*) consists of four tableaux: the bride's tresses are plaited in readiness; the groom seeks his family's blessing; the bride leaves as the two mothers lament; and the wedding feast, at whose close the nuptial bed is prepared. Yet it is a measure of this work's concreteness that not just its scenic but also its musical content can be so fully conveyed in the version for pianola, created in 1923 by Pleyel and revived in 1998 by Rex Lawson (Other Minds label). The result fairly startles in its capturing of essentials.

### TWO EARLY VERSIONS

The 1917 version of *Les noces* (also referred to as the 'orchestral version'), abandoned almost as soon as it was finished, remains fascinating for the way Stravinsky overlays groups of woodwind, brass and strings such that the sound of a conventional orchestra is rarely apparent. Yet these instruments most often fail to meld with the voices, tending to override or even cancel them out. **Robert Craft's** 1973 account (issued by CBS in the USA and Italy but not the UK) with the Gregg Smith Singers and Orpheus Chamber Ensemble is technically assured while overly studio-bound, making **Peter Eötvös's** subtler 1987 version with the Savaria SO the preferred option. The



The premiere of *Les noces* by the Ballet Russes in Paris, in June 1923, conducted by Ernest Ansermet and featuring choreography by Bronislava Nijinska

crucial cimbalom part is notably prominent here; whether substitution of tenor for bass in the closing solo has precedence in terms of performance is uncertain.

Mention of the cimbalom is a reminder that two of these instruments, along with harmonium and pianola, combine with percussion in Stravinsky's unfinished 1919 version (also referred to as the 'ensemble version'). Despite substitution of piano for





PHOTOGRAPHY: CCI/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

pianola, the sheer immediacy of Craft's 1973 account (on the same disc as his 1917 version) remains preferable to that from 2005 by René Bosc and the French Radio Chorus, whose spacious sound diffuses the clarity of this line-up (Harmonia Mundi – nla; also includes 1923 version). It's a pity that Theo Verbey's 2009 realisation of the final two tableaux for the 1919 version remains unrecorded.

#### 1923 VERSION - IN ENGLISH

Igor Stravinsky's most innately Russian work found early incarnation in English, the composer himself opting for D Millar Craig's translation when making his first recording for Columbia in 1934. Period enunciation gives this a feeling akin to something by English operetta composer Sidney Jones, but soprano Kate Winter summons real plaintiveness at the start,

and baritone Roy Henderson emotes fervently towards the close. Pianists (including Leslie Heward and Ernest Lush) and percussion are reduced to a gamelan-like backdrop, but their energy and accuracy are rarely in doubt. The reviewer 'HFVL' (10/34) praised all concerned, but considered that 'the world is sufficiently full of unpleasant noises and that wilful addition to the number





No one recorded *Les noces* more than Robert Craft (left), a friend of Stravinsky (right, with the score)

should be punished as a criminal offence'. This may be a recording of overtly historical interest, but it nevertheless should be heard.

Only in 1954 was its successor recorded – by the New York Concert Choir and Orchestra with Margaret Hillis (Vox – nla; 3/55). Roger Fiske lauded the vigorous playing and brilliant recording, but it has never been reissued. **Igor Stravinsky's** 1959 remake for CBS features the American Concert Choir, Columbia Percussion Ensemble and a notable roster of pianists in Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss and Roger Sessions. Yet this account rarely rises above the earthbound, with little pathos or elation to offset its stolid phrasing or rhythmic doggedness. Those wanting an English version should seek out **Eric Kujawsky** with the Oakland Symphony Chorus and Redwood SO (1992), which, despite technical flaws, exudes highly engaging spontaneity and verve, not least in the informality of its textual revisions.

### 1923 - IN FRENCH ... AND IN GERMAN

Recordings in French, as translated by Stravinsky's collaborator Charles-Ferdinand

Ramuz, tend to centre on the 1961 account by **Ernest Ansermet**. Having given the world premiere 38 years earlier, Ansermet could claim a special affinity with this score, yet neither the singing of the Geneva Motet Choir nor the playing of the Suisse Romande Orchestra percussionists is more than adequate, while the soloists (mellifluous tenor Hugues Cuénod aside) betray problems with pitch and intonation. Undoubtedly a significant historical document, but hardly a front-runner.

A more assured French version for Philips was directed in 1954 by **Felix de Nobel**, with the Netherlands Chamber Choir and featuring the distinctive timbre of the tenor Ernst Haefliger. There is also a live 1971 account from him with the same choir and a superb line-up of singers (witness soprano Dorothy Dorow and bass Jules Bastin) and pianists (including Reinbert de Leeuw). It comes in volume four of the Royal Concertgebouw anthology series; if released separately, it would be a main choice irrespective of language.

Michel Corboz, recorded in 1973 with University of Lausanne forces (Erato), enjoyed only a brief catalogue life; and **Sylvain Cambreling's** 2010 version, a conscientious collaboration of Franco-German musicians, pales in comparison with De Nobel's 1971 account, its refined singing outweighed by rhythmic stolidity and cautious tempos in a reading that obstinately refuses to take flight.

Mention must also be made of Pierre Boulez, whose sole commercial account (Adès – nla) was set down in 1965 by musicians from the Paris Opera, with a notable roster of singers, including the young José Van Dam, and pianists, not least Geneviève Joy. The result is impressive in its brusque and unrelenting manner, Boulez unafraid to ride roughshod over French prosody in the interests of rhythmic accuracy. But it remains a matter of regret that he never re-recorded this piece in Russian during his conducting maturity.

Ever wanted to hear *Les noces* in German? A translation by Karlheinz Guthem and H Krüger has long been in circulation but has mustered only one recording. Wolfgang Schäfer's 1988 account (Koch Schwann – nla; 7/91) features the Frankfurt Kantorei, a workaday quartet of pianists and a variable group of soloists (the youthful Cornelia Kallisch excepted) who between them pursue an energetic though unsubtle course over the four tableaux. Marc Rochester, reviewing in *Gramophone*, was not greatly impressed, and now this reading evinces little more than curiosity value.

### 1923 - IN RUSSIAN

The first *Les noces* in Russian, by **Mario Rossi** and the Vienna Chamber Choir in 1955 (for Nixa), was praised by Alec Robertson (12/55) for conveying the work's 'abounding vitality and astonishing rhythmic resource'. But **Karel Ančerl's** 1964 account is the earliest wholly recommendable recording. The Prague Philharmonic Choir and Czech PO combine well with a 'national' line-up of

### CLASSIC CHOICE

**Karel Ančerl** cond

Supraphon ® SU3692-2

Bringing poetry as well as precision to bear on the music, and atmospherically recorded in



a far from easy acoustic, this is a reading that wears lightly its half-century and more. Who said that *Les noces* needs to be devoid of humanity, warmth or vulnerability?

### DYNAMIC CHOICE

**Leonard Bernstein** cond

DG ® 423 251-2GC

Not the most literal of readings, with some questionable balances between voices,



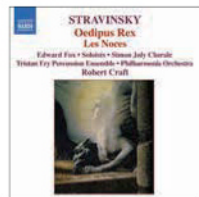
pianos and percussion, this nevertheless has an irresistible sense of excitement throughout. Bernstein was never better in Stravinsky than in *Les noces*.

### REALISTIC CHOICE

**Robert Craft** cond

Naxos ® 8 557499

Not the account to go to for interpretative revelations or superficial excitement, but the



clarity and consistency of the singing and playing make this Craft's best 1923 version: the best *Les noces* that Stravinsky never got round to recording.

singers and pianists, the Rudolfinum acoustic not risking clarity or focus in what is arguably the most instinctive reading. Stravinsky's music becomes not only innovative but also inevitable.

No one recorded *Les noces* more (and in more versions) than **Robert Craft**. As Stephen Plaistow noted (1/68), his 1965 CBS account (supervised by the composer) far exceeds Stravinsky's by being sung in Russian - which the soloists, Gregg Smith Singers and Ithaca College Concert Choir handle securely; while the Columbia Percussion Ensemble boasts four well-coordinated pianists. Craft returned to the work in 1991 (MusicMasters - nla), in an unmannered if overpressed reading which would have benefited from more equable balance between voices and instruments, and a less constricted acoustic. Neither of these things is an issue on Craft's 2001 version - recorded (as was the composer's first account 67 years earlier) at London's Abbey Road studios, featuring a first-rate cast of singers (not least mezzo Susan Bickley and tenor Martyn Hill) alongside the International Piano Quartet and Tristan Fry Percussion Ensemble. Tempos and balance are finely judged in what is in almost every respect the most consistent, if not the most revelatory, reading (it's on Naxos - but seek out the original Koch imprint for Craft's invaluable extensive notes on the evolution of this work).

The 1970s was an indifferent decade for *Les noces*. A 1974 recording by Borivoje Simić with the Belgrade Radio and TV Chorus and Orchestra (Everest - nla) never appeared in the UK; neither did that by James Levine (RCA - nla), a vivid team effort from the 1977 Ravinia Festival which deserved wider currency. No such problem affected **Leonard Bernstein's** 1977 account, with the English Bach Festival Chorus and Percussion Ensemble partnered by an animated vocal quartet and unequalled roster of pianists in Martha Argerich, Krystian Zimerman (barely out of his teens), Cyprien Katsaris and Homero Francesch. Arnold Whittall (2/78) queried the hard-driven quality and the balance favouring instrumentalists over singers, though doubts are silenced by the sheer exuberance sustained right through to the fervent closing benediction.

**Zdeněk Košler** was not primarily a Stravinsky conductor, but his 1982 *Les noces* is strikingly idiomatic in rhythmic incisiveness, with a keen overall momentum, even if ensemble suffers at times. The Prague Radio Choir and Symphony Orchestra are joined by a decent line-up of soloists and pianists, notably in a propulsive take on the



Karel Ančerl: brings poetic precision to *Les noces*

climactic fourth tableau, and this account (in a two-disc set of mainly live Stravinsky performances) is a worthy supplementary recommendation. Alongside it, Roland Hayrabedian in 1986 (Pierre Verany - nla; 10/87) feels overly self-contained in expressive impetus, but characterful singing and disciplined playing from Les Percussions de Strasbourg redress the balance, as does the pertinent coupling of Maurice Ohana's masterly *Cantigas*. It's a pity about the anaemic bass solo

towards the close, as noted by reviewer David Fanning.

**Peter Eötvös's** 1987 recording is a fine one, his bass's final solo sounding far more eloquent. The Slovak Philharmonic Chorus and Amadinda Percussion Ensemble are complemented by quartets of vocalists and pianists (including Zoltán Kocsis) who make this as idiomatic as any account. It was overshadowed in the UK, though, by **James Wood's** 1990 reading, the Voronezh Chamber Choir combining with the New London Chamber Choir and Ensemble, alongside a formidable team of largely British singers and pianists, in a performance widely praised for its well-nigh ideal balance between expressive authenticity and interpretative finesse. Maybe the sound, natural to a fault, lessens its ultimate impact, but there is no shortage of clarity in music-making, which enables more of this score to be heard than in any other recording.

Passing swiftly over William Noll's effortful and out-of-focus version (the slowest at 26'35") with the Choral Guild of Atlanta from 1991 (Newport Classic - nla), the most extraordinary of all recordings, by **Dmitri Pokrovsky** and his Pokrovsky Ensemble (1993), is based on extensive research into traditional sources, channelling ancient and modern into a head-on collision. The singing exudes

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / CONDUCTOR		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1934	Stravinsky [English]	EMI © (22 discs) 217575-2 (10/34 <sup>th</sup> , 5/93 <sup>rd</sup> ; 2/09)
1954	De Nobel [French]	BnF Collection © (12/56 <sup>th</sup> )
1955	Rossi	BnF Collection © (12/55 <sup>th</sup> )
1959	Stravinsky [English]	Sony Classical © (57 discs) 88875 02616-2 (12/62 <sup>nd</sup> , 12/15)
1961	Ansermet [French]	Decca © (2) 443 467-2DF2 (10/61 <sup>st</sup> , 9/95)
1964	Ančerl	Supraphon © SU3692-2 (2/05)
1965	Craft	Sony Classical © (57 discs) 88875 02616-2 (1/68 <sup>th</sup> , 12/15)
1971	De Nobel [French]	RCO Live © (14) RCO06004 (7/07)
1973	Craft [1917 & 1919]	Sony Classical © (57 discs) 88875 02616-2 (12/15)
1977	Bernstein	DG © 423 251-2GC (2/78 <sup>th</sup> , 6/88)
1982	Košler	Praga Digitals © (2) DSD350 057
1984	Porcellijn	Arthaus Musik © 108149; © DVD 102115
1987	Eötvös [1917 & 1923]	Hungaroton © (1/89)
1990	J Wood	Hyperion © CDH55467 (2/92 <sup>nd</sup> , 2/14)
1992	Kujawsky [English]	Clarity © CCD1005
1993	Pokrovsky	Nonesuch © 7559 79335-2 (9/94)
1994	Ashkenazy	Decca © (7) 478 3028DB7 (9/96 <sup>th</sup> )
2001	Carewe	Opus Arte © DVD OA0833D
2001	Craft	Naxos © 8 557499 (9/02 <sup>nd</sup> , 1/05)
2004	Fasolis	DG © (4) 477 9884GM4 (1/13)
2005	Reuss	Harmonia Mundi © HMG50 1913 (9/06 <sup>th</sup> )
2009	Gergiev	Mariinsky © MAR0510 (A/10)
2010	Cambreling [French]	Glor Classics © GC10351
2011	Béziat [French]	Naïve © DVD DC510504
2013	Currentzis	Sony Classical © 88875 16512-2; © 88875 19040-2 (2/16)
2013	Falletta	Naxos © 8 573538

all 1923 version, in Russian, except where indicated



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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA/© Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is £74.75; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (£64); Digital Club (£84); Gramophone Club (£106). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe £22.80, Rest of World £27.00. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email [subscriptions@markallengroup.com](mailto:subscriptions@markallengroup.com)



James Wood, whose 'all-round technical finesse and emotional impact is still unequalled' in *Les noces*

both intonational and timbral freedom, and the playing modifies the score by recourse to folk instruments while recreating keyboard parts on a computer in an amalgam of the composer's varying intentions. With a vivid 'pop' balance, the result compels in its assaultive impact – David Fanning (9/94) not unreasonably called it 'Sensational!' – yet it eschews the abstraction and emotional distance which makes this music Stravinsky's.

**Vladimir Ashkenazy's** 1994 account with the Ernst Senff Chamber Choir and Berlin Deutsches SO can only seem staid in comparison. Soloists are unexceptionally fine while the pianists (from Piano Circus) are notably agile, but spacious sound diffuses what dynamism there is.

### 1923 IN RUSSIAN - POST-MILLENNIUM

**Digeo Fasolis's** live 2004 version sees the return of Argerich in a disciplined quartet of pianists that combines well with the soloists, the Swiss Radio and TV Chorus and the Lugano Percussion Group for an animated if unequivocal reading. It has more impact than Bosc in 2005 (nla, as before), the conceptual opposite of Pokrovsky in its French-sounding Russian and rhythmic poise. The French Radio Chorus, Scob Piano Quartet and Ad'ONF percussion ensemble acquit themselves with enthusiasm, but a sense of the inconsequential lingers.

No less fastidious or insinuating, that from **Daniel Reuss** with the RIAS Chamber Choir and Musikfabrik (2005) evinces greater interpretative focus. With Carolyn Sampson among the soloists, and Tamara Stefanovich among the pianists, this is a lucid and vital account; only a marginal lack of impetus in the fourth tableau

prevents a whole-hearted recommendation. **Valery Gergiev's** 2009 reading, the first with all-Russian musicians, is very different in its stridency of attack and headlong impetus (the quickest at 21'36") – it's as though there's a determination to return the work to its indigenous roots. The Mariinsky Chorus and Orchestra are on fine form, as are the well-drilled quartets of singers and pianists, but the final impression is of a virtuosic yet unyielding display keen to prove its point.

The most recent recordings, both from 2013, afford further contrasts. Directing the Virginia SO Chorus, **Les Noces** Percussion Ensemble and an enthusiastic if erratic solo quartet, **JoAnn Falletta** secures a bracing and incisive response whose inconsistencies of pacing and balance could possibly be the result of different takes not quite matching. Virtually the same length, that from **Teodor Currentzis**, who directs the combined forces of MusicAeterna with an artfully blended vocal quartet, yields greater expressive subtlety and interpretative insight, yet his liberties with rhythm and phrasing risk contrivance. Coupling *Les noces* with Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto might seem bizarre, but it at least enables Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Currentzis to appear throughout the booklet as the wedding couple of Nastasia and Fetis.

### DVDs OF THE 1923 VERSION

Given Stravinsky's concern over quite how to stage *Les noces*, it is perhaps unsurprising that few visual realisations have been issued. Michel Tabachnik directs the orchestra and ballet of Paris Opera in a revival of Bronislava Nijinska's original choreography as part of a 1989 tribute to

the Ballet Russes which never made the transition to DVD ('Paris Dances Diaghilev'; Teldec/NVC Arts – nla). Those keen on Nijinska's innovative work can turn instead to the Royal Ballet's 2001 revival, expertly conducted by **John Carewe**, even if its remorseless symmetry and austere decor can seem almost wilfully divorced from the score. A striking alternative is that choreographed by Jiří Kylián for Netherlands Dance Theatre in 1984 (as *Svadebka*), closer to modern dance but with a more humane take on the nuptial narrative, suitably enhanced by **David Porcelijn's** incisive musical direction.

Yet the most persuasive visual option comes in **Philippe Béziat's** 2011 film *Noces: Stravinsky/Ramuz*. An exploration of the wartime friendship in Lucerne between Stravinsky and Ramuz, this integrates the latter's reminiscences, spoken by Dominique Reymond, with rehearsal sequences directed by Mirella Giardelli. It climaxes in a gripping performance that choreographs the roles of soloists and chorus – as though acknowledging the composer's thwarted desire to have singers, players and dancers together on one stage. This is an essential adjunct to the four main recommendations.

As to the specifics of those 'top choices', I would be poorer without the precision of Ančerl, the panache of Bernstein or the consistency of Craft. But limited to just one, I would have to choose Wood, whose all-round technical finesse and emotional impact is still unequalled.

From that day in 1915 when Stravinsky played through a draft for Diaghilev, who wept with emotion, *Les noces* came to be heard as the most inclusive, radical and personal realisation of Stravinsky's musical aesthetic. Its sound world as influential on his contemporaries as on successive generations of jazz and world musicians, the piece has lost little of its originality this past century. Now, in an era when musical fragmentation has become the norm in Western culture, its recreative synthesis could yet provide the exemplar for what might still be possible. ③

### TOP CHOICE

**James Wood** cond

Hyperion © CDH55467

Anglo-Russian *entente*, at least in terms of its musicians, is central to the success of a reading



that vividly encompasses the sum total of this piece. It confirms that precision and expression are no more incompatible in *Les noces* than in any other work by Stravinsky.



# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

## Bregenz, Austria & UK cinemas

**Carmen on the Lake, live until August 20, in cinemas September 14**

One of the highlights of the Bregenz Festival this summer is its new production of Bizet's *Carmen*. Firstly because of the team behind it, as it's directed by Kaspar Holten, with a set by Es Devlin. Then there's its musicians, Paolo Carignani conducting a cast headed by Gaëlle Arquez as Carmen and Daniel Johansson as Don José, with the Bregenz Festival Chorus, the Prague Philharmonic Choir, and the Vienna SO. Finally there's its dramatic setting: an extraordinary floating stage, with a 7000-seat open-air amphitheatre, just off the Austrian shore of Lake Constance. If you can't make it in person, Cinemalive is screening it in over 300 UK cinemas as part of their 'The World's Most Spectacular Operas' strand.

[bregenzerfestspiele.com](http://bregenzerfestspiele.com), [cinemalive.com](http://cinemalive.com)

## Angelika Kauffmann Saal, Schwarzenberg, Austria & ORF

**Liederabend with Marlis Petersen, August 30, broadcast September 5**

There can be few better places in the world to enjoy the chamber music of Schubert than at

Austria's annual Schubertiade, both in terms of the level of performances and in terms of the sheer jaw-dropping beauty of its alpine location, and the Schwarzenberg leg of 2017 (the festival's other base being Hohenems) concludes this month with all the style we've come to expect. We bring to your attention an all-star afternoon recital mixing the music of Schubert with Schumann and Strauss, from the soprano Marlis Petersen, with pianist Camillo Radicke and clarinetist Paul Meyer. As is usual for Schwarzenberg, this takes place at the Angelika Kauffmann Saal, a purpose-built all-timber 600-seat chamber hall surrounded by alpine pastures.

[schubertiade.at](http://schubertiade.at), [radio.orf.at](http://radio.orf.at)

## Konzertsaal, World Conference Centre, Bonn & Deutsche Welle

**Andrés Orozco-Estrada conducts the premiere of *be@thoven*, September 10 & then as a podcast**

The Beethovenfest Bonn stands out among major festivals for its multiple remote viewing options, with a significant proportion of the concerts either broadcast live or recorded for future transmission via the festival's

broadcasting partners, Deutsche Welle, Deutschlandfunk and DeutschlandfunkKultur or Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Right now we're going to point you in the direction of one particularly anticipated festival performance, because each year the festival commissions a composer to write a new work inspired by one of Beethoven's, and this 'Russian Beethoven' concert opens with Andrés Orozco-Estrada conducting the hr-Sinfonieorchester in the world premiere of Vladimir Tarnopolski's *be@thoven*. Next on the programme is the work that inspired it, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4 with soloist Khatia Buniatishvili. Then, the orchestra play *be@thoven* for a second time. Stravinsky's *Petrushka* completes the evening.

Tarnopolski's *be@thoven* will then be available as a podcast from Deutsche Welle.

[beethovenfest.de](http://beethovenfest.de), [dw.com/de/beethovenfest](http://dw.com/de/beethovenfest)

## Église Saint-Pierre et St Paul, Brulon, Église Notre-Dame Sablé-sur-Sarthe & Culturebox

**Oriental Baroque at France's Festival Baroque de Sablé, August 25 & 26**

This year's Festival Baroque de Sablé (in France's Pays-de-la-Loire) has Orientalism as

## ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

**Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* from Madrid is rescued by the wonderful central performance by Ermonela Jaho**

### Puccini

Ermonela Jaho's Cio-Cio-San has been seen on several of the world's great stages – a portrayal that has all the intensity familiar from her performance as Suor Anglica in the Gramophone Award-winning DVD of *Il trittico*. That was in Richard Jones's terrific Royal Opera production; here, though, she finds herself in a distinctly less convincing staging of *Madama Butterfly* at Madrid's Teatro Real.

Director Mario Gas relocates the action to a 1930s film studio: cameramen appear at various *moments critiques* and the drama drifts between make-believe and 'reality'. It certainly looks stylish, but the framing device



Puccini – MADAMA BUTTERFLY

only muddles the drama and our sense of the characters.

Take away the frame, in fact, and it's essentially a straightforward, handsome staging, in which Jaho is joined by very

decent colleagues. Marco Armiliato conducts sensitively, and Jorge de León is unusually likeable, if occasionally raw-sounding, as Pinkerton. Angel Ódena makes a kindly Sharpless, and Enkelejda Shkosa is touching as Suzuki. I was less sure what to make of Francisco Vas's caricatured Goro.

There are few quibbles about Jaho's central performance, though. She sings intelligently and powerfully, transcending the vagaries of the

production to present a fully three-dimensional *Butterfly* – totally committed, vivid and moving. **Hugo Shirley**

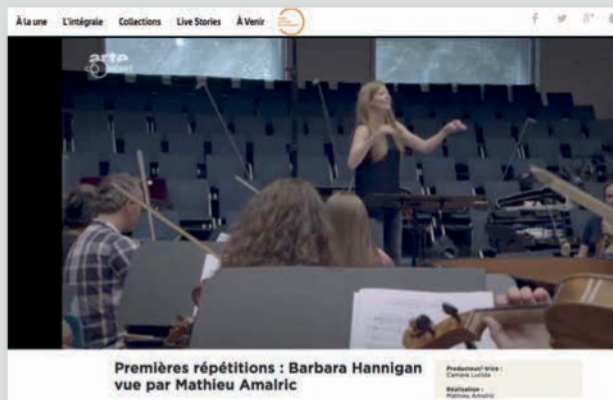
Available to view for free (until October 31) at [theoperaplatform.eu](http://theoperaplatform.eu)

## Barbara Hannigan, as both conductor and singer, sheds a unique light on Alban Berg's *Lulu* Suite

### Rehearsing Berg

As Barbara Hannigan explains in her interview with Neil Fischer on page 12, modern music is central to her musical philosophy, and though it might be stretching it a bit to call Alban Berg's *Lulu* 'modern music' (it dates, after all, from 1934), it remains a startlingly original creation. Hannigan is, of course, a magnificent interpreter of the role of *Lulu* (as her 2012 performance from Brussels, and now on a BelAir DVD reveals), and here she gives us Berg's *Lulu* Suite, a kind of five-movement 'taster' that Erich Kleiber persuaded him to write to try and garner support for the opera's first performance.

Hannigan, seen here as both singer and conductor, is utterly inside this



music, and this mesmerising film, directed by Mathieu Amalric, traces the emergence of a performance from first rehearsal to the recording, for Alpha, of the complete suite. Hannigan's a wonderful guide to this music, whether poring over the

score, talking to the orchestra (and employing some poetic and vivid imagery) or singing along. Watching people conduct and sing at the same time can be a sometimes unintentionally comic experience, but Hannigan adds a new dimension to the score with her beautifully fluid, almost balletic conducting style. The young Amsterdam-based Ludwig Orchestra respond to her with palpable affection and with some gloriously sensual playing. Don't

delay as it's only available to view until August 28, and the recording's not too far off either. **James Jolly**

Available to view for free (until August 28) at [concert.arte.tv/fr/premieres-repetitions-barbara-hannigan-vue-par-mathieu-amalric](http://concert.arte.tv/fr/premieres-repetitions-barbara-hannigan-vue-par-mathieu-amalric)

its theme. This has produced a particularly interesting programme of lesser-spotted Baroque gems, and thanks to the streaming site Culturebox you can watch two particularly colourful-sounding programmes from afar. Streamed live will be the August 25 concert from Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, pairing François Couperin's exotic *La Sultanne* sonata with Marin Marais' technically demanding *Suite d'un goût étranger*. Then recorded for streaming at a later date is 'L'Orgue du Sultan' from the innovative French Baroque ensemble, L'Achéron, under the direction of François Joubert-Caillet. This programme by violist Andreas Linos is inspired by a magnificent gift of an organ that Elizabeth I made in 1599 to her powerful ally against Spain, Sultan Memet III of Turkey, which she delivered by sea, accompanied by its maker Thomas Dallam and a troupe of English musicians! What, this programme explores, would have happened when musicians of the English polyphonic tradition met those of Istanbul ...?

[lentracte-sable.fr](http://lentracte-sable.fr), [culturebox.francetvinfo.fr](http://culturebox.francetvinfo.fr)

### Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg & online

**Yu Long conducts the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra & Maxim Vengerov, August 27**  
**First Season Opening Night, September 1**

Having opened in January, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie is now really getting into its stride in terms of its live video streaming offerings, meaning that we can now enjoy what is a very tempting and distinctive 2017-18 season from afar, and for free. We're going to draw your attention this month to two such

distinctive programmes. First, a summer season visit from the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra under Yu Long, whose all-Chinese first half features He Zhanhao and Chen Gang's *Butterfly Lovers* Violin Concerto with Maxim Vengerov as soloist; Shostakovich's Symphony No 5 then completes their programme. Then on September 1 Thomas Hengelbrock conducts the newly-named NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra in the opening concert that has a Beethoven focus: the rarely performed incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont*, in a newly-designed half-scenic version featuring the actor Klaus Maria Brandauer.

[elbphilharmonie.de](http://elbphilharmonie.de)

**Assorted Munich venues: Herkulessaal, University of Music and Performing Arts Great Hall, Prinzregententheater, Philharmonie Gasteig**

**ARD International Music Competition, August 28 – September 15**

Based in Munich, this is Germany's largest classical music competition. This year's categories are piano, violin, oboe and guitar, and the prizes include international concert engagements, plus radio broadcasts at the ARD Broadcasting Union. As is fitting from a competition established by broadcasting corporations, the semifinals, final and prizewinners' concerts are all streamed live on the competition website, as well as via Facebook Live in the BR Klassik Facebook channel. The Bayerischer Rundfunk will also be broadcasting it extensively through their various programmes.

[bc.de/ard-musikwettbewerb](http://bc.de/ard-musikwettbewerb)

### Trinity Church, New Wall Street

**Webern festival, September 12-14**

These three days form the first part of a season-long traversal of Anton Webern's entire catalogued works, which Novus NY and their director Julian Wachner, with the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, are presenting under the banner of their Times Arrow Festival. The programming of these first six concerts looks like a fascinating mix, too, with Webern's works presented alongside an eclectic mix of other composers' works, from Schoenberg, Sebastian Currier and the 16th-century Ludwig Senfl. Plus, you can watch the lot streamed on their website.

[trinitywallstreet.org/videos/music](http://trinitywallstreet.org/videos/music)

### Barbican, London, medici.tv & BBC Radio 3

**This is Rattle: The Damnation of Faust, September 17**

You'd have to have been living on the moon not to know that Sir Simon Rattle has finally arrived in London as Music Director of the London Symphony Orchestra. To celebrate his inaugural season, from September 14-21 the LSO are bringing 10 days of celebratory events giving the public a chance to step inside Rattle's vision of classical music. Among the offerings you can catch on BBC Radio 3 are the opening concert featuring four British composers of today. However, we're particularly flagging up a concert you'll also be able to watch remotely, because his reading of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* with the London Symphony Chorus will go out live via medici.tv. It's a great cast too: Karen Cargill, Bryan Hymel and Gerald Finley.

[iso.co.uk](http://iso.co.uk), [medici.tv](http://medici.tv), [bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)





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THIS MONTH the speaker system that could be all you need, a novel digital solution and why there's still a case for a dedicated personal audio player **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

## Making music more personal

From all-in-one-systems to even better music on the move, our listening options continue to be expanded

Technics is the latest brand to have been bitten by the all-in-one bug. Not content with bringing its direct-drive turntables down nearer to the grasp of us mere mortals after launching with luxury pricing, it's developed its systems range with the arrival of the SC-C70 system **1**. Due in the shops in the next month or two, the new model combines CD and network playback with Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay, and has built-in speakers. It optimises its five-driver array to the room in which it's used thanks to the company's Space Tune calibration system, and uses technologies trickled down from previous Technics separates, including JENO Engine jitter reduction and Load Adaptive Phase Calibration. Acoustic lenses and louvres are used to control the dispersion of the drivers, and the whole unit has a glass top-plate covering the CD mechanism. Pricing was yet to be confirmed as we went to press.

Another well-known hi-fi company, Acoustic Energy, has launched the latest version of its Bluetooth speaker, the Aego BT2 **2**. The new model, which sells for £249, supports both aptX Bluetooth and USB phone-charging, and uses twin 6.5cm drive units, powered by 40W of amplification and boosted by side-firing



passive radiators. The BT2 is said to deliver a convincing stereo image but can also use its built-in Stereolink mode to combine two speakers for an even bigger sound. The inbuilt rechargeable batteries are said to be good for up to 36 hours of use, and control is via top-mounted touch-buttons.

Making music even more personal is the Beoplay E4 **3** for Bang & Olufsen, described as 'the Danish lifestyle audio brand's next generation active noise cancelling earphones'. The design is said to suppress up to 15dB more low-frequency noise than the system in the previous E3 model, using a two-microphone hybrid system. There's also a gesture control allowing the user to turn off both the

music and the noise cancellation, which the company calls Transparency Mode. The headphones come with four sizes of silicon ear-tips and a pair of Comply Memory Foam tips, plus a flight adaptor and a charging cable for the noise-cancelling module. The Beoplay E4 sells for £249.

Also designed for music on the move is the iFi iOne miniature DAC/headphone amp **4**. With both coaxial and optical digital inputs plus Bluetooth with aptX, the £199 device can handle content at up to 192kHz PCM, 384kHz DXD and 11.2/12.4MHz DSD. It's powered from a connected USB device and has integrated noise suppression for USB power and galvanic isolation on the digital inputs, while digital-to-analogue conversion is via Burr-Brown's True Native technology.

Finally this month, a luxury digital player from Astell & Kern, in the form of the A&ultima SP1000, selling for £3299 **5**. Finished in stainless steel or copper, it uses an eight-core processor to handle digital data at up to DSD11.2MHz, and advanced USB-C connectivity for faster data transfer when loading music. It has a large 720x1280-pixel display and can be fast-charged in just two hours to give 12 hours of playback. **6**

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SEPTEMBER TEST DISCS



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● **REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH**

# KEF LS50 Wireless

This development of the popular mini-monitors isn't just a pair of speakers – it's a complete home audio system

The hi-fi industry is not exactly averse to hyperbole, from model numbers overstating the power of amplifiers to fanciful descriptions suggesting a product is the best of its kind. But just once in a while you come across something understating its true capabilities – and that's very much the case with the prosaic name KEF has given to its latest compact speakers, the LS50 Wireless.

They're based on the popular – and striking-looking – LS50 mini-monitors, which were launched back in 2014 and have been updated along the way with some sound-enhancing tweaks and a range of adventurous colourways. Those included the company's 'Foundry Finishes' of black with a copper-coloured driver and Blue Ice White, harking back to KEF's roots as Kent Engineering and Foundry back at the beginning of the 1960s.

The little speakers started picking up good reviews and awards almost straight away, for both their looks – informed by finite element analysis to create the cabinet shape, and the company's UniQ coaxial drive unit – and their sound. At £799/pr, the LS50 brought more than a hint of the studio monitor to domestic listening rooms, and I'd be prepared to suggest that the new Wireless version is going to prove even more popular – and influential.

Selling for £2000/pr, the LS50 Wireless looks very like the original, itself said to be inspired by the classic LS3/5A design (even if comparing the old and new required something of a leap of imagination). There's still the same curvaceous cabinet, just 30cm tall, and single UniQ driver, with its tweeter set in a waveguide at the centre of the mid/bass cone; but the set of controls atop one speaker, and connections and heatsinks to the rear of both, reveal the presence here of both built-in amplification and direct connectivity for a range of sources.

The LS50 brought a hint of the studio monitor to domestic listening rooms and the Wireless version could prove even more popular

As well as being powered speakers, with a 200W Class D amplifier for the 13cm magnesium/aluminium alloy mid/bass driver and a 30W Class A/B amp for the 25mm vented aluminium dome tweeter sitting in its 'throat', the LS50 Wireless also has onboard digital-to-analogue conversion, with Toslink optical and USB Type B inputs as well as RCA analogue, plus Bluetooth 4.0 connectivity with aptX.

## KEF LS50 WIRELESS



**Type** Active wireless/streaming speaker system

**Price** £2000

**Drive units** KEF UniQ combining 13cm mid/bass and 25mm tweeter

**Amplification** 200W for mid/bass, 30W for tweeter

**Inputs** Optical digital, USB Type B, Bluetooth with aptX, Wi-Fi, Ethernet

**Outputs** Connection between speakers, subwoofer

**Accessories supplied** Cables, remote handset

**Finishes available** Gloss black with blue drivers, Gloss white/copper, Titanium grey/red

**Dimension** (HxWxD) 30x20x30.8cm

[kef.com](http://kef.com)

Add in network connectivity in the form of RJ45 Ethernet and dual-band Wi-Fi, and the realisation grows that this isn't just an active speaker system but a complete audio system in the form of two speaker enclosures. Yes, you can connect conventional hi-fi components to those inputs, your computer to the USB socket or your smartphone or tablet via Bluetooth,

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

As an all-in-one system, the LS50 Wireless has limited add-on potential, but you might consider...

### KEF LS50 SERIES SPEAKER STANDS

The 'official' stands for the LS50 series speakers come in a choice of three finishes to match the LS50 Wireless colourways.



### IPAD PRO TABLET

A tablet is the best way to control the LS50 Wireless and make the most of its features: this is the new iPad Pro.



but the LS50 Wireless is just as happy playing music from local network stores or internet streaming services: you can use the built-in controls and supplied remote control handset but a handheld device running the dedicated app will open up all the capabilities of the speaker system.

And what capabilities there are. As well as operating as a 'dumb' active speaker fed by external services, the LS50W can stream (as already mentioned), and access services including Tidal's hi-res music. It will be able to act as an end-point for Roon systems and, thanks to that Bluetooth compatibility, could even be voice-activated using a device such as Amazon's Echo Dot.

What's more, the onboard digital signal processing not only allows even greater control of the drivers than in the conventional 'passive' LS50 speakers – the rest of the design, including the unusual flexible rear port is also carried over – but also allows a range of set-up options to optimise the sound. These are wisely divided into basic and expert levels; in the former the user can make selections for the use of the speakers on stands or on a desk, or close to or away from a rear wall, while the 'expert' menu allows much more in-depth adjustment of the equaliser to attain just the effect the user requires, along with adjustments for other parameters.

## PERFORMANCE

Setting up the LS50 Wireless is relatively simple, as the control app is designed to walk the user through the procedure, or this can be done with a computer connected to the right speaker using the USB cable supplied.

There are mains cables for both speakers, as you might expect, and then an Ethernet-style cable links the two speakers – that bit isn't wireless! If you need a longer cable than those supplied, these aren't exactly expensive: I found 5m and 10m cables, which should be more than enough for any needs, for less than £5. Not that I'd suggest putting the speakers 10m apart; instead, such a length will give the user scope for running the cable between the two while keeping it hidden.

KEF also sells matching stands for the LS50 speakers at £250/pr: made by Custom Design and based on the popular FS104

model, they're available in black, white or charcoal to match the speakers. However, I got on just as well with the speakers on my ancient Atacama SE24 stands, or indeed sitting on my desk either side of my monitor.

You can also add an active subwoofer – there's a single RCA output on the right speaker – but unless you have a huge room that really won't be necessary. The combination of the already impressive LS50 configuration, the built-in amplification and the new DSP-powered 'time correcting crossover' gives the wireless version even greater clarity and punch than the original speakers could muster when driven by a good amplifier. That makes this all-in-one solution an entirely captivating listen.

While convincing as desktop speakers, the LS50 Wireless system is even more so when the speakers are standmounted and used to fill a room with sound. There's a precision and focus to the sound that's remarkably attractive, and little allowance needs to be made for the diminutive dimensions of the enclosures, so rich, full and effortlessly powerful is the sound.

I just started to type 'These are glorious little speakers' but stopped myself: these are glorious speakers, irrespective of size, and with their combination of speed, definition, extension and detail could be not just the only speakers anyone would ever need but all the system most of us could ever want. With one's music collection ripped to network storage and/or the odd subscription for a lossless streaming service, the KEF system – under the control of the very slick and easily understood app for Android and iOS – provides quite the most fuss-free listening experience I have encountered for a long while, with no trade-off in sound quality to achieve that convenience.

Is it so good that from this moment on the conventional hi-fi system is dead? Neither I nor – I am sure – KEF would go that far but the LS50 Wireless is indubitably a very tempting introduction to an 'alternative universe' of home audio, one which I am sure will find favour with many users, as much for its captivating sound quality as its remarkable flexibility and simplicity. Just add music ... **G**

## Or you could try ...

**The unique capabilities of the LS50 Wireless make it very tricky to find any direct rivals but if you fancy similar speaker systems they're possible to find, albeit with some allowances having to be made.**

### Easya speaker system

For example, the Easya speaker system from French manufacturer Focal comprises a pair of floorstanding speakers with built-in amplification, combined with a hub unit to expand connectivity and add niceties such as Bluetooth wireless working. The system lists at £1899 but at the time of writing was available online with a discount of around £650, making it a very tempting prospect. For more information see **focal.com**.



### AVI speakers

AVI's little DM5 active speakers at £995/pr are a smaller and more conventional alternative to the KEF system, but while they have the amplifier and speaker part of the equation sorted, you'll have to add on some hardware to feed music to their analogue inputs. Something like an Apple Airport Express or even a Google Chromecast Audio 'puck' would get you started. See **avihifi.co.uk** for more details.



### Naim Mu-so amplifiers

Finally, if you want an all-in-one system with streaming, internet radio and more, you really need look no further than Naim's original Mu-so, complete with multiple drivers and amplifiers, plus DSP tuning, all in a single enclosure. The price is £995 and you can read more at **naimaudio.com**.





## ● REVIEW PS AUDIO LANROVER

# A clever and compelling sound-enhancer

An innovative solution for USB audio tackles some of the downsides of connecting your computer to your hi-fi, while adding flexibility

‘Yes, but what does it actually do?’ That was one of the most common questions I heard when trying to explain to friends and colleagues that I was trying out the LANRover system from American company PS Audio. You see, the Boulder (Colorado) company is best-known for its decidedly upmarket digital components, and yet here we have a component with what appears to have a very sensible price – at least by the standards of the high-end audio industry. Well, it’s sensible when you work out what it does, and even more so when you hear the difference it can make to the sound of a ‘computer audio’ system – provided, that is, you are sufficiently open-minded not to blank out any idea that such a device can enhance a digital audio system.

There’s quite a strong contention that any such addition to a system, be it a change of digital cable or the insertion of extra components, can’t make a difference, because ‘digits is digits’ or ‘it’s all just 1s and 0s’, so the signal is either there perfectly or it isn’t there at all, with all other changes being illusory. However, I’ve had enough experience of hearing major alterations brought about by everything from changes of cable to different power supplies and even support materials to ensure I remain open-minded about all this stuff, and willing to keep on experimenting.

That’s exactly what I did with the PS Audio device, which is basically an isolator designed to fit between a computer’s USB port and a DAC with a USB input. That’s a highly convenient way to play music from a computer to a suitable hi-fi system – and many more amplifiers are appearing with a Type B USB input for just this purpose – but it’s not without its drawbacks, not least of which is the path this affords for electrical noise from the computer to find its way into the hi-fi system. It’s not unknown for clicks and buzzes to be heard; but more to the point is the low-level noise and electrical interference that can creep through, impinging on the definition of the audio being transmitted.

One of the major causes of this is the fact that, as well as data, USB connections carry DC power – a 5V supply designed for USB devices without their own power supply – and indeed some ‘audiophile’ USB cables



### PS AUDIO LANROVER

**Type** USB audio interface

**Price** £650

**Inputs/outputs** Sender USB Type B in, Ethernet out; receiver Ethernet in, USB Type A out

**Power** Sender from USB 5V; receiver has its own mains adaptor

**Accessories included** USB/Ethernet cables, power supply for receiver

**Dimensions** (WxHxD, each unit) 7.5x2.7x8.5cm

**psaudio.com**

**signaturesystems.co.uk**

aim to improve the sound by cutting this power link. But the LANRover takes this even further by breaking the direct signal path between the computer and the hi-fi.

The £650 package comprises a sender to plug into your computer and a receiver for your hi-fi system, the two being linked via a run of Ethernet cable, over which the music is sent as network-style packet data, which it generates from the normally fragile USB data, simultaneously isolating the computer from the hi-fi system.

*I’ve tried it with a range of systems and can say with confidence that it improved the sound of every set-up*

By reclocking and cleaning the audio data it eliminates distortion-creating jitter, and by buffering the data avoids drop-outs and other errors. It also breaks the 5V power line: the sender, which has a Type B USB input and Ethernet output, is powered from the connected computer, while the receiver comes with its own 5V power supply. Furthermore, it extends the possible distance between the computer and the hi-fi: while a direct USB connection is really only good for a few metres, the LANRover is good for 100m or so point to point, or even longer when connected to a home router

to work over home network cabling. With the sender connected to the home Wi-Fi router and an inexpensive Ethernet bridge hooked into the receiver it can even make the connection wirelessly.

Lights on the two units confirm the link has been made and data is being passed, and that’s about it: there’s no need for drivers or any set-up, and plugging it all up is just a matter of – well, plugging it all up, then pressing a button on each unit to pair them. Add in software to drive your computer remotely using a tablet or phone, and the computer containing your music doesn’t even need to be in line of sight, or even in the same room.

### PERFORMANCE

Tricky one, this. Unlike most components reviewed in these pages, the LANRover can’t be described as having a sound per se, and its effect will vary according to the components – computer, DAC/amplifier – with which it’s used. But having tried it with a range of systems over the extended period it has been in my system, I can say with confidence that it improved the sound of every set-up with which it was used.

The effect is what one might expect with a reduction of electrical noise and jitter: greater openness and clarity, with greater insight into not only the details of recordings, from instrumental timbres to the odd snatched breath and so on, but also the ambience of the performance. That’s apparent in a good recording in the second or so before the music starts, where one can sense the space in which things are happening – an instant impression that then informs the whole listening experience – or in the way the last notes decay into the recorded atmosphere at the end of a movement or piece.

Yes, this requires a high-quality system that bring out these details; but then anyone thinking of dropping £650 or so on such refinements will probably already have a pretty well-sorted set-up. And once this added clarity is experienced, it’s hard to go back to ‘normal’ computer audio having heard how much more it has to give. I’ve tried a lot of enhancements for my digital audio system but this is one of the most compelling – and the ease with which it can be implemented adds to the appeal. **G**

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● **ESSAY**

# Even in the age of the do-it-all iThing, there's still a case for a dedicated music player

A pocket machine optimised for audio will give you more musical enjoyment, whether travelling long-haul or just listening in the garden

A dinosaur: that's what it seems I am. On a number of recent flights, I've looked around at my fellow passengers – purely out of professional interest in the music equipment they're using – and observed that, while it seems the size of headphones is on the rise, almost everyone now seems to be using their mobile phone or tablet as an entertainment source.

Of course, this may seem like an argument that's long ago been had and settled: just as everyone these days seems to take their pictures on their phones – or on special occasions sometimes a tablet device, which makes for a slightly unusual spectacle – so music has become something you just have on your phone, along with your emails, calendar, favourite TV shows and everything else. It's happened, it's done, so just move on, yes?

Not quite. As I mentioned, the size of headphones is rising. No longer are many people just using the little earbuds or earpods supplied with their phones: for all of Apple's attempts to 'lock them in' by losing the standard 3.5mm headphone output, the current weapons of choice for travellers seem to be anything from large Beats headphones to the ubiquitous Bose Quiet Comfort noise-cancelling models.

I tend to favour a pair of elderly in-ear 'phones from Swiss company Phonak, which a while back got fitted into a pair of custom moulds by Snugs, thus providing excellent sound isolation and a reliable fit; but the same applies with these as with larger pairs of conventional headphones. Yes, you can use them with your iPhone or Galaxy or whatever and they'll make a reasonable enough noise, but to hear them at their best they need to be used with something dedicated to music playback, not a multipurpose device.



Onkyo's DP-S1: dedicated to playing music

I've tried workarounds in the past, including various battery-powered portable headphone amplifiers and even the excellent Chord Mojo DAC/headphone amp, but then the problem with such devices is the extra clutter involved, and remembering to pack all the

right cables – let alone grab all the right bits and pieces in that inevitable scramble of finding your seat, cramming your bag into the overhead locker and finally taking your place.

*I'm no fan of headphone listening but if that's how I have to listen, I want it to sound as good as possible*

And then there are extra batteries to charge, settings to fiddle with and so on, not to mention the experience of getting off a long flight listening to music to find one's phone is all but flat and then hunting for somewhere to recharge. It all gets in the way of the 'sit down, switch on and let the music flow' experience, and it's especially hard to relax into favourite pieces when you're watching your phone's power reserves ebb away.

So for these reasons – and with the same thinking that sees me still carrying a camera when I travel, knowing it will give me better pictures than I can manage holding my phone in front of my face – I'd rather have my music on a dedicated music player, fully able to immerse me

in what I'm listening to. I have to say I remain no great fan of headphone listening; but if that's how I have to listen, I want it to sound as good as possible.

To give a parallel, it's perfectly possible to get a decent sound from a home computer, be it desktop or more portable, but again one either needs to consider the addition of extra equipment – isolators, re-clockers, external digital-to-analogue converters and

the like – or at the very least strip out the computer hardware and slim down its software so it's dedicated to the single task of playing music. I've followed both paths with my music-playing computer, and very good it sounds too. Trouble is, it's not much use for anything else these days.

Fortunately, just as there are plenty of dedicated music players in the market designed to feed into a hi-fi system, so there are some very impressive pocket music devices designed to make the most of music on the move and fully capable of being used with high-quality headphones. The twinned companies of Japanese audio, Onkyo and Pioneer, have launched and then updated their Android-based music players, overlaying their own software on the basic operating system and disabling functions likely to impinge on the sound (they also offer software able to do some of this on your phone or tablet if you must use that as a music source). The second-generation Onkyo machine, the £400 DP-S1, is typical of the companies' offerings: smaller and less expensive than the original DP-X1, it nonetheless offers file compatibility all the way up to DSD5.6, will decode MQA files and even has a dual-DAC configuration to allow it to drive balanced headphones if required.

Meanwhile, one of the mainstays of high-end personal music, Astell & Kern, clearly believes there's a future in quality players: as you can read in the news pages this month, the only slightly clumsily named A&Kultima SP1000 sells for a fairly heady £3299, in a choice of stainless steel or copper finishes. **G**



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Inspirational: Nathan Milstein

## Influential Milstein

When I was a child, the first recording I remember in my home was 'A Milstein Recital'. As I learned to play the violin as a teenager, I gradually acquired more and more records of many other wonderful violinists; somehow, though, that first recording remained my very favourite (and still is to this day). It seemed to possess the perfect balance of poise and passion, as well as clarity of thought and an improvisatory freedom. Combined with flawless intonation and a tone that embodied a restrained sensuality, this recording, as well as others of Milstein, acted upon me as a teacher of what the essence of great violin artistry could entail. For more than 40 years I performed in symphony orchestras, and have loved the playing of many great artists; yet the approach to the violin of Milstein still remains the most influential and as close to ideal that I can imagine. It was extremely gratifying, therefore, when Nathan Milstein was honoured by induction into the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame (June). In my opinion, there is no one more worthy.

Jeffrey Plotnick  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

## Brymer brainteaser

In his article on Jack Brymer (Icons, June), Mark Pullinger suggested two standout recordings from Brymer's years as principal clarinet with the LSO. One of these was Previn's recording of *Rhapsody in Blue*; but the clarinetist here was actually Gervase de Peyer, Brymer's predecessor as

## Letter of the Month



Spiritual significance: cathedral choirs are of a very high standard

## Singing the praises of vocal music

Of all the reviews each month in *Gramophone* I find those of vocal works the most fascinating. Not least in these is the way in which sacred music seems to be increasingly significant in these days of falling church attendance! No doubt this is partly due to renewed interest in early music and so-called authentic performance but perhaps too it reveals an interest in and search for some spiritual significance in a time of materialism and secularism. Indeed, as general church attendance falls, cathedral congregations

are increasing, due not least to the high standards of the music on offer. I was particularly moved to write this month because of the July reviews and among them especially that of the William Petter CD of music written for St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge, the church at the northern end of the bridge which saw the recent atrocity in Southwark. The standard of all your reviews is consistently high and helpful in the choice of what to buy.

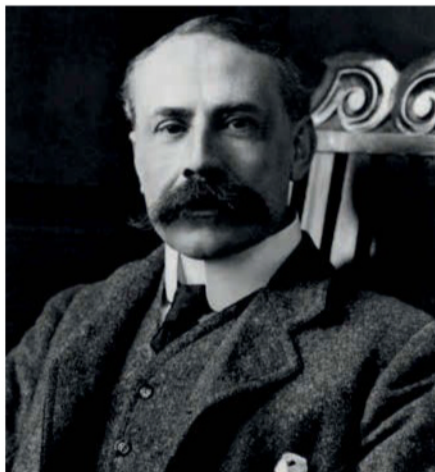
Stuart Edwards, Morecambe, Lancs, UK

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**PRESTO**  
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principal. The other recommendation was Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2, also with Previn. In the July issue was further confusion: you gave a 'correction', stating that Bernard Walton deputised as clarinetist in the Rachmaninov. But there were *two* LSO/Previn recordings, and it is the second of these, for EMI dating from 1973, that became the 'classic', and on this Brymer is unmistakably the clarinetist. Previn's first recording, which did feature Bernard Walton, was made in the late 1960s for RCA. All of this is a reminder

that the LSO were very fortunate to have two of the greatest clarinetists of all time in their ranks during the 1960s and '70s, but as both were also in demand as soloists and in chamber music, there was quite regular work for co-principals and guests in the orchestra during this period. To hear Jack Brymer's glorious clarinet-playing in the LSO I would especially recommend Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Suite and *Manfred* Symphony, and Shostakovich's Symphony No 10, all with Previn.  
Andrew Smith, via email



Edward Elgar: how should we characterise him?

## Private Elgar

I caught on TV two and a half movements of Barenboim's second Elgar Prom, and found that his performance didn't quite confirm the thrust of many of the opinions in your Elgar cover story (August), which I read subsequently.

The Second Symphony may be imposing but it is, in the end, a personal document, not an imperial one, despite its dedication. So is 'Nimrod', of course – one of the most personal of all Elgar's compositions – an encore chosen by Barenboim with marvellous acumen, not least because of where Jaeger (Elgar's friend immortalised in 'Nimrod') came from or its ceremonial use over the past century and more. And the superb recreation of *Pomp and Circumstance* No 1 which followed – with a good deal more than just mischief (Barenboim's, and Elgar's own) behind it – underlined the personal too. Not one single Promenader that night was moved to give tongue to any of the words. But they didn't hold back at the end.

If we must characterise Elgar, we should remember that he once said



Concluding an André Cluytens quest

his ideal was Schumann, that he had a good deal in common with the earlier composer (not least an interest in musical cryptography), and that he wrote at a time when the full power of the post-Wagnerian orchestra was still being explored. We tend to assume that Elgar's grand orchestral gestures are public – but would we if they took place in an opera house pit? After all, Strauss's orchestral hero is, more often than not, himself. The 'spirit of delight' which haunts the Second Symphony is really privately perceived, and Elgar's 'Heldenleben' is surely *Falstaff* – with an opening theme very close to a minor-key parody of that of the opening of the Second Symphony.

*Jim Brennan, via email*

## An icon within Icons

How nice to see Arthur Berv mentioned as 'wonderful' as the horn soloist in the slow movement of Stokowski's 1934 Tchaikovsky Symphony No 5 (Icons, August). Berv had joined the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1923 at the tender age of 17, succeeding his teacher – the aptly named Anton Horner – as principal horn in 1930. He was subsequently headhunted by officials desperate to find a first horn to satisfy Toscanini in the newly formed NBC SO. As an inducement, Berv was offered five times his Philadelphia salary to accept the job! He and his brothers Jack and Harry remained members of the horn section throughout the entire period until the orchestra was disbanded in 1954; Arthur enjoyed a long life, only passing away in 1992. His playing lives on!

*Neil Mantle, via email*

## Concealed Cluytens

I wish to thank Rob Cowan for his review of André Cluytens's orchestral recordings (Reissues, July), for it has enabled me to finally conclude a six-decade quest to obtain a copy of his recording of D'Annunzio's play *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* with the integral score by Debussy. I first learned of this recording in Igor Maslowski's Letter from Paris column. I then expected the album to be released in Britain or the US, but this was not to be. And when I finally got to visit Paris, it had been deleted. I began to wait for a reissue, first on LP, then CD. As the decades wore on, I grew more and more discouraged. And then I saw RC's article and quickly ordered a copy of this album. Thanks for helping me to end my quest with success.

*Joseph Cooper*

*Santa Barbara, CA, USA*

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Strauss, R Enoch Arden. *Bell/Tedeschi*. ⑆ **ABC481 5558**

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<b>Penderecki</b>			Keyboard Sonatas – Kk239; Kk492	<b>64</b>									
<b>Capriccio per Siegfried Palm</b>	<b>72</b>												
<b>Cadenza</b>	<b>72</b>												
<b>Per Slava</b>	<b>72</b>												
<b>Violincello totale</b>	<b>72</b>												
<b>Suite for solo cello</b>	<b>72</b>												
<b>Pfitzner</b>													
<b>Die Rose vom Liebesgarten</b>	<b>106</b>												
<b>Pierné</b>													
<b>Introduction et variations sur une ronde populaire</b>	<b>71</b>												



# Tim Parker

The chairman of the National Trust and the Post Office on his love for opera and Pergolesi

**My father played** the clarinet and saxophone in the band of the 11th Hussars. He was actually going to go to Kneller Hall, the army music school, to study conducting. Then the war broke out and all the guys in the band were drafted into the Eighth Army and fought at El Alamein. That pretty much brought his musical career to an end. My first memories are of him playing records and conducting to them. I always remember *Finlandia* was his favourite.

**He and I** both sang in Tewksbury Abbey Choir when I was quite young, and then I went to Abingdon School and sang in the choir there. I was the one pushed forward at the service of Nine Lessons and Carols to do 'Once in Royal David's City', which is probably the most nerve-racking thing you can ask anyone to do: to sing on your own, unaccompanied, in front of an audience of hundreds, if not a couple of thousand.

**I started learning** the flute when I was around 11 and proceeded at a decent rate, and got my grade 8 when I was 15. The thing about the flute is it's a relatively easy instrument to play OK, but a very difficult instrument to play really well. The world isn't short of flautists, and though I enjoyed playing a lot I knew I was never good enough to be a professional musician.

**I didn't do** much music at Oxford really, and then my business career took off, I got married and had a family, and so I stopped playing for a long time. Then I became sufficiently affluent that I could look at buying a decent flute, because one of the things I regretted at school is that I had a very basic student flute, and actually the quality of the instrument makes quite a difference to what I can do with it. And so, having not played for quite a long time, I went out and bought myself a decent solid silver flute, and found someone to accompany me. He's a very talented organist and has been accompanying me for over 20 years now. We play the whole repertoire, stuff that is impossibly difficult for me, things like Prokofiev sonatas, Debussy, Poulenc, Bach, Telemann. We try to do everything, but honestly, the results are best kept within one room!

**I listen to** a lot of opera. There are always new things that I hear in opera. I just find it very emotionally involving; it's something which commands one's attention. The great thing about streaming is that you can compare performances very easily – you can play the same scene one after another and hear very easily and very quickly the difference.

**If there's music** that I probably play more than anything else, it's Pergolesi – not just the *Stabat mater* but also the *Salve regina*. Emotionally it soars, and melodically it's beautifully constructed. There are a lot of pieces which are genuinely religious in context, obviously, but this is just as



## THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Bach** Goldberg Variations  
Glenn Gould (Sony)

I do still like Glenn Gould's playing a lot. I can often listen to the *Goldberg Variations* and hear something new, even if it is him mumbling over the top of it!

close as music gets to being somehow linked to some almighty purpose or some mystical creative source. It just sounds to me perfect in every way.

**I remember when** the Grange Festival first started and the opera house was in its previous form – much smaller and at 90 degrees to the way it sits today. It's a uniquely wonderful neoclassical building in some of the most beautiful scenery, in one of the most beautiful counties, Hampshire, where I happen to live. I was very keen to support it: I've been going there for many, many years and feel that it adds a lot to the Hampshire musical and cultural scene.

**One of the** other things I'm involved with is the Royal Academy of Music. We have a wonderful conservatoire there, one of the very best in the world, so trying to provide whatever expertise or experience I've got is one small way in which I can make a bit of a contribution. **G**  
*Tim Parker is a trustee of the Grange Festival: for details, visit [thegrangefestival.co.uk](http://thegrangefestival.co.uk)*

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Stockhausen *Stimmung* • Steve Reich *New York Counterpoint* • Louis Andriessen *De snelheid*  
Arvo Pärt *Spiegel im Spiegel* • Cage *4' 33"* • Grisey *Vortex Temporum*





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